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MOLOCHOLOGY NOT THEOLOGY:

PENANG SERMONS.

BY

JAMES ABERIGH-MACKAY, B.D.,

SENIOR CHAPLAIN OF MEERUT;

AUTHOR OF 'LONDON TO LUCKNOW,' 'HYMNS TO CHRIST AS GOD,' 'AN ANSWER TO THE ARCHBISHOP OF YORK,' ETC.

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TO

ROBERT IBBETSON, ESQUIRE,

OF AYER ETAM,

FORMERLY GOVERNOR OF PENANG,

HONOURED AND BELOVED BY ALL GOOD MEN WHO KNOW HIM:

AND TO

THE MANY KIND FRIENDS

WHOM I LEFT IN THAT BEAUTIFUL ISLAND,

This Volume

IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

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" He prayeth best who loveth best
All things, both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all."

Coleridge's 'Ancient Mariner.'

"The whole scheme of Scripture is not yet understood."—*Bishop Butler.* '*Analogy,*' iii. 2.

"Even now, after eighteen centuries of Christianity, we may be involved in some tremendous error, of which the Christianity of the future will make us ashamed."—*Vinet.*

"The duty of the Christian, with the word of God in his hand, is plain. It is simply to ask, 'WHAT IS TRUTH?' not, What is it most expedient to teach, *as if it were* truth?"—'*Destiny of the Human Race,*' p. 309.

"Since we are plainly taught that our Lord is the Saviour of all men; and it is consequent hence, that He hath procured grace, sufficiently *capacitating all men* to obtain salvation; we need not perplex the business, or obscure so apparent a truth, by debating *how* that grace is *imparted;* or by labouring overmuch in reconciling *the dispensation thereof* with other dispensations of Providence."—*Isaac Barrow.*

"His own Son, the Son of His love, died for mankind, and in that death *all sin was forgiven.* The restoration of the race has been commenced. Every year sees it evolving and expanding. The true spiritual unity of the race is coming more distinctly into view. Salvation is verily come, and restitution will not tarry."—*Bishop Ellicott,* '*Destiny of the Creature,*' p. 88.

I.

NATIONAL DUTIES AND PROSPECTS.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee and praise thy glorious name."—1 *Chron.* xxix. 11, 13.

When we grope our way backward along the dark vista of ages, and endeavour to make ourselves acquainted with the events which chequered the history and moulded the fate of nations, while we cannot but regret the scantiness of the details which we are able to gather from sculptured inscriptions, broken monuments, and ruined cities, as well as from the books which remain to us, it is evident and beyond a question that the Empires of antiquity had one uniform experience in this respect, that each of them gradually progressed from infancy to maturity, and then speedily passed on through the stages of decline, decrepitude, and dissolution. Babylon, for example, and Nineveh, founded in the second century after the Deluge, became gradually consolidated into the great Assyrian Empire, the magnificence of which astonishes and dazzles the imagination at this day. After wielding the destinies of the Eastern world about twelve hundred years that mighty empire fell, and, in the circumstances of its fall, the inspired prophecy concerning it was fulfilled to the letter. The Babylonian, the Persian, the Macedonian Empires,—the kingdoms of Egypt and Syria, so prominent in sacred story—Greece, nurse of the Arts, mother of the Graces—Rome, mistress of the world,—all these great powers in succession have waxed

and waned and vanished. From age to age the political geography has been recast. Wealth has brought leisure; leisure, refinement; refinement, luxury; luxury, dissipation; dissipation, profligacy; and profligacy, ruin. Such is, in brief, the history of all the great empires, kingdoms, and dynasties that have passed away and left behind them only their "footsteps on the sands of time."

The question arises, Shall Britain pass away too? Shall the proud empire on which the sun never sets, decline and fall and disappear, before new political combinations which shall emerge out of the ruins of existing states? Is death a necessity to empires as to men? Is it appointed unto all kingdoms once to die? To the last part of the inquiry we answer *No*, and we hope to show how it *may* come to pass that Britain shall escape the doom of all dead empires.

Not one of *them* possessed the true religion. Rome in her latter days *might* have enjoyed this priceless blessing; but she put it away from her. She sealed her own fate by wedding Christianity to Paganism, whose offspring, Popery, has cursed fair Italy,—has cursed one-half the world with spiritual blight and murrain for a thousand years—has filled all Europe with seditions, privy conspiracies and rebellions, and entailed upon her deluded votaries false doctrines, heresies and schisms, hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word and commandment. The Roman Empire is no exception. Not one of the old empires possessed the true religion. Superstition and idolatry—gross and abominable—degraded them all. *Therefore they perished.*

But how do we establish the relation of cause and effect between the false religion of the people and the political decay of the state? Certainly not by any mere theory, but by direct reference to facts, so far as they are accessible. The various stages of political decay in Greece and Rome are presented to us by historians, ancient and modern, with considerable distinctness; and concerning the causes which led to the ultimate destruction of their power, we can speak with confidence. The further we go back, the less ample our materials become,

and consequently we are obliged to reason more by analogy in the case of the earlier empires. But with reference to *them* we have this obvious advantage, that the statements of Scripture concerning most of them, if brief, are explicit, and leave no doubt in an unprejudiced mind as to the cause of their final ruin. The whole matter may be expressed in a few words. As knowledge increased, priestcraft and superstition were exposed, and the mythological absurdities on which the national religion was based became ridiculous in the eyes of all thinking men. Thus idolatry gradually but surely relaxed its hold upon the national conscience, and the people were left without even the bad anchorage of a false creed. So long as they believed something, natural religion bound them to the observance of certain social proprieties: the law of nature and the sentiment of honour, though poor substitutes for the law of God and the sentiment of mutual love, exercised, to some extent, a controlling power.

But when the opinions and conduct of the educated few were known and imitated by the uneducated many, when the masses of the people came to believe nothing beyond the materialism which addressed itself to the senses,—then all social bonds were severed, even the ideas of patriotism and national glory melted into thin air before an all-absorbing selfishness; and the stern, self-sacrificing heroism with which their fathers had maintained the integrity of the empire and shed their blood on many a hard-won field rather than disgrace their country's standard or suffer a stain on their personal honour, gave way to the unrestrained gratification of the basest passions, absolute indifference to the welfare of the community, and the low ambition which has but one aim—the temporary interest of the individual. Thus the exposure of the false religion and the absence of the true led (by an inevitable necessity) to the corruption of the individual, the degradation of society, and the dissolution of the state.

We know that this was the case in Greece and Rome; and we know that similar principles are at work among

the remnants of the Mahometan and Hindoo dynasties in India, as well as among the idolaters of China; and although, when we apply the same reasoning to some of the more ancient empires, the facts may be wanting which would supply the links of the chain, we may rest equally satisfied that in them the progress of decay followed the same natural law, and was hastened by the same unavoidable causes.

But from all these dead empires Britain is distinguished by the possession of the true Christian faith,—the only Religion revealed by God, and, therefore, the only Religion adapted to the wants of man—of the individual, the family, the community, and the nation. It has been nobly said that "Christianity is synonymous with life; it gives immortality to *nations here* and to the individual hereafter." We are probably close upon the period which the prophet Daniel, in his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, leads us to anticipate. He says, "There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days." "In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." That kingdom can be none other than the kingdom of the Messiah, which is to be established at the commencement of the millennium. The dissolution of the ancient empires was completed by their relapsing into barbarism. This calamity, we are assured, never can overtake a nation in which the Word of God is read and reverenced, and in which the pure worship of God is maintained in the sanctuary, the household, and the closet. Let Britain act as the forerunner of Christ, by preparing the way for His millennial reign, and she shall never fall from her high position in the vanguard of the nations; but onward, onward still she will advance, until the silver trumpets proclaiming the jubilee of the world shall meet her on the march, and she shall become identified for ever with that wider "kingdom which shall never be destroyed." To be absorbed into that kingdom will be the greatest glory of a nation. Our Lord reproved the Pharisees for not interpreting the signs of the times.

The second Advent of Christ, "*to reign upon Mount Zion and among his ancients gloriously*," is plainly predicted, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Every hour is bringing us nearer to the event, and though the *time* is not revealed, certain signs of its approach are given, and we are commanded to watch. The foolish dogmatism of individual interpreters is sometimes considered a sufficient reason for neglecting all consideration of the prophecies referred to; yet who will pretend that such an argument can bear examination for a moment? The predictions of our Saviour's *first* coming were misunderstood and misrepresented, not only by individuals, but by whole classes of a people to whom the more ancient Scriptures were familiar from childhood. Among the signs given is this very *unbelief*,—"There shall come in the last days scoffers, saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" The very Church exclaims, "*My Lord delayeth his coming*," and, as if weary of waiting, she slumbers and sleeps. Among the signs given are the prevalence of infidelity on the one hand, and of missionary enterprise on the other—the increase of Popery and the decay of Mahometanism—rapidity of communication and the diffusion of knowledge—a homeward movement among the children of Israel,—and "*wars and rumours of wars, earthquakes, pestilences*, and *famines* in divers places." Who will deny that these signs are gathering upon our horizon? As for war, even now the half of Europe is in a blaze, and not only our most judicious interpreters of prophecy, but many of our wisest politicians, anticipate the near approach of one of the bloodiest periods in the history of our race. It may be that the very struggle which has lately closed in India shall prove to be ultimately connected with the destruction of Mahometanism, to which prophecy is pointing, and that the recent rebellion is but one of the opening scenes of the great drama of what is called in Scripture "the last days." Let us "watch and pray that we enter not into temptation." With full—with overflowing hearts, it becomes us this day to render praise and thanks unto the God of battles for the signal victories with which it has pleased

Him during the last two years to crown our arms. How can we express our acknowledgments more suitably than in the words of David? when he blessed the Lord before all the congregation and said, "Blessed be thou, *Lord God of Israel our Father*, for ever and ever. Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine: thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to *make great* and to give strength unto all. Now, therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name." It is not our sword that hath done it, but it is His own right hand and His holy arm that hath gotten us the victory, and none will be more ready, we believe, to recognize the providence of God in this great success than those who survive of an army that has most freely shed its blood in the sacred cause of law, order, liberty, and truth. And while our hearts are swelling with emotions of gratitude to God for the success with which it has pleased Him to crown the skill of our generals and the courage of the troops, let us think of the many who have fallen, and let us pray for Divine support and comfort to all the scattered multitude of widows and orphans, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, bereaved since the troubles began. Yes, it surely is our duty to pray for *them*, that the Divine Father of the fatherless, and husband of the widow, and friend of the mourner may pour a healing balm into their bleeding hearts, and bless to their souls this great affliction. While we are thankful to God that the sacrifice of life has been small on our part in proportion to the magnitude of the success, we must remember that this larger view of the event will not assuage the grief of those whom the glad news of victories reached by the same post with the sad tidings of bereavement. And our patriotism, brethren, ought not to evaporate in empty exultation over the recent victories. Let us remember what the great ends are which God contemplates when He puts a nation in the van of contemporary

states. The chief end of our existence here as *individuals* must also be the chief end of a nation's existence. A nation's true greatness must consist in promoting the glory of God, by providing for the temporal and eternal welfare of man. Any view of national duty and responsibility that falls short of this is unworthy of a Christian. If Britain would not follow the empires that have perished, she must be the *salt of the earth* to preserve God's truth, not merely at home, but also among the heathen over whom God hath given her dominion. She must take her stand firmly and resolutely on the eternal verities of God's Revelation. And when we speak of Britain we do not personify a mere abstraction. We mean the people of Britain, wherever they may be, young and old, high and low, rich and poor, soldiers and civilians. Of that aggregate, each individual among us is a unit. We dare not put away from us our share of the responsibility. I dare not put it away from myself; none of you dares put it away from himself. It is a reality before God. We ought to reason thus: "I am one of the many who constitute the nation. If each were doing as I am doing, could Britain be called truly the salt of the earth, performing the work which God hath given her to do?"

If not, will you not resolve for the future, in dependence upon God, to live by a new rule and upon new principles —even those which He has given for our direction? He is ever ready to accept true repentance, and who is there among us that needs no repentance? Whoso confesseth and forsaketh his sins shall find mercy. This you can never do, from the heart, until you believe that Christ loved you and gave Himself for you. "My son, give me thine heart." God demands this, and He will be satisfied with nothing less. How can you give Him your heart unless you believe that He *loves* you? Impossible! "We love Him because he first loved us." This is the living principle of all true Christianity. It is only when this principle of love is implanted and cherished within us that we can grow in grace, and desire above all things the honour and glory of our Heavenly Father and the advancement of our Redeemer's kingdom, by the mani-

fested power of the Holy Ghost. Our own salvation is the first thing to be secured, then the salvation of others. Every loving child of God is anxious to extend the influence and enjoyment of the Gospel at home and abroad. Think for a moment how these things are regarded now from the spirit-world by those who have recently gone from among us. From their point of view how utterly insignificant and contemptible the pomp and circumstance of life now appear! Soon we shall pass away too. Soon a new wave of population shall advance, and we shall have disappeared from the surface. If we are Christians, we are part of the life of the nation; if we are not Christians, we are helping, as far as in us lies, to hasten its decay and ultimate downfall. When we look back from the place of departed spirits, we shall see the precise effect of our influence, for good or for evil. Love of country is at best but a blind and useless instinct in the breast of him who has not discovered the real secret of his country's welfare. We may exult over the thought that, in the late military operations, the renown of our armies has been nobly sustained, and that the achievements of the heroic periods have been emulated by the valour of men who have been our own companions. But oh! what meaning has all this for *us*, if our views of life and immortality are so narrow and unworthy that we are unable to look upon it as anything more than a temporary political advantage gained over a treacherous and cruel enemy? If we rejoice in a right spirit, it is not merely because of the defeat of the rebels, but because we know that the defeat of the rebels will be, under God, for the ultimate benefit of the people of India, and, indirectly, of every other people in the world, because we believe that the religion of Jesus, and, in its train, civilization and liberty, will be extended to those who are sitting in darkness, and groaning under the burdens of ancient superstitions, and that thus the time will be hastened when the knowledge of the Lord shall cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. Then let us praise and magnify the Lord, and say, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name."

II.

OUR FUTURE.

"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."—2 *Peter* iii. 8."

And a time is coming when a thousand years shall be to *us* "as one day,"—when we shall have lived through as many thousands of years as we have lived days upon the earth. And there is another point on, on, inconceivably farther on in the eternal future, when we shall have lived as many thousands of years as we have lived hours upon the earth, and when, even to us finite creatures, a thousand years shall be no more, in proportion to our whole past, than one hour is now. Then shall we know and see that "onward to one divine event the whole creation moves:"—that the one divine event is harmony, full and perfect; and that all methods which seemed mysterious to our ignorance, gradually unfold and blossom into proofs of divine wisdom, as our point of view rises and our knowledge expands.

> "Our little systems have their day:
> They have their day, and cease to be:
> They are but broken lights of Thee:
> But Thou, O Lord, art more than they."

So sings our greatest living poet; and, in so singing, he gives a voice to the belief which is growing and spreading among reflecting minds in all lands—a belief which is the reasonable conclusion to be drawn from the past—a belief which lights up the future with the glory of God.

Sin is discord—sin is rebellion—sin is misery. He who goes on in sin may well be afraid. There is a day coming when your sin will find you out, though now you may be able to hide it. And the sooner your sin finds you out, the better will it be for you. Anything to stop your career of folly and lead you back to God would be a blessing, though outwardly it might seem a calamity. The longer you live away from God, the harder it will be to return. Happy are they who serve the Lord from their youth. What so terrible, in view of the future, as old age encrusted with selfishness and sin! Any chastisement by which God softens and melts a hard heart in time is a signal proof of divine love. Then try to take patiently whatever chastisements it may please God to send. Consider well their meaning, their purpose. Work together with God in bringing about this purpose, for thus you may be saved from further suffering. Though we may not be able to see the connection, certain it is that God never inflicts pain but where it is needful. Surely it is, or ought to be, a comfort to the sufferer to know this. It must be a comfort to every one who believes it.

To the infinite Deity, existing from eternity to eternity, our measurements of time are nothing, except in relation to ourselves. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." But when we look back to our past life, and think of the many troubles and trials we have passed through—when we think of all the misery that we have witnessed—when we think of all the misery which has been endured in the world since we came into it, though the millionth part of that misery has never come within our knowledge,—when we think of what has been endured through wars, oppressions, famines, pestilences, and innumerable forms of evil, during the eighteen hundred years that have elapsed since our Lord lived upon the earth,—and then, when we go further up into the vista of ages, and think of all the wretchedness that human beings have endured upon the earth from the beginning, it seems an immense aggregate. The thought is staggering, almost

overwhelming, when we read, on the other hand, in the Christian revelation, that "God is love." But God is working on an immense scale, whereas of the mighty whole we see no more than a handbreath. Last night the sky seemed alive with stars, many of them suns far larger than ours, though distance makes them seem but points. Yet of the universe we have no reason to suppose that we see more than the outskirts; just as one sees little towns, and villages, and clusters of buildings at intervals in the neighbourhood of London, which, though distinguished by various names, are all in reality outlying districts of the great metropolis. That the stellar universe, God's house of many mansions, is all unpeopled, and that on this earth only there are intelligent creatures in material bodies, it is hard to believe. Take the other view. Suppose that those ten thousand times ten thousand orbs of light are teeming with populations. Then consider the words of St. Paul concerning the mystery which had been hidden from the foundation of the world, but was revealed to him, that, "in the dispensation of the fulness of time," God is to "gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven and which are on earth;" and some idea dawns upon the mind of the grandeur of the scale on which God is working, and of the profound significance of events which have taken place upon this globe,—above all, the significance of the incarnation and atonement of the Divine Son, by whom God created all things.

Now, as we never could have understood fully what light is if there had not been darkness, so our ideas of holiness never could have been so clear as they are when we see it contrasted with sin. There is here, perhaps, a hint of one use which the permission of evil is designed to answer. We can see no further. We are lost in the depths of our ignorance. But we see enough to make it obviously our highest duty and our truest interest to worship and obey Him who is seated upon the throne, God over all, blessed for ever. We see enough to prove to us that no madness can equal that of setting up our will in opposition to His, since we are made for eternity, and we shall

be for ever under the eye and in the hands of Him against whom, in our folly and infatuation, we have dared to rebel.

If you were to devote one quarter of an hour between the successive Sundays to meditation in earnest upon the one word *Eternity*, it would be impossible for you—I say impossible—to live on as so many do without any serious thought of preparation for that future on which we are all so soon to enter,—that infinite future in which thousands of years shall pass over your head as days and hours do now. What, then, are you going to do? What is your plan? What is your intention? When are you going to begin to carry it out? You cannot intend to destroy yourself—to ruin your soul—to defy the wrath of the Omnipotent God. To such a conclusion as this you cannot come deliberately. You are living on without reflection, but you have not resolved never to return to your Father. Then remember that He threatens in love, because He sees the inevitable consequence of perseverance in sin. You know not what a day may bring forth. There is but a step between us and death. When we look back, by-and-by, we shall see how true this was. Oh, that your eyes were open to see this now, while there is time to repent and escape the doom of the unrepenting! God is waiting to be gracious, if you will turn from your sins and follow Christ. He is ready to give you His grace to help you in proportion as you earnestly use the means within your reach. Do you pray? Are there not some among us who never bend the knee to God in private, and who seldom or never open the Bible, in which the gospel is revealed? You will not be able to plead that you were not warned. Thousands, tens of thousands of years hence, you will see the vast importance of your life on earth. Think of that future looming up before you. Think, pray, repent; prepare to meet your God. The time is coming when, even to you, a thousand years will be but as one day of your immense and now inconceivable past.

III.

CONSCIENCE THE TRUE LIGHT.

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."—*St. John* i. 9.

THE true light is Jesus Christ. He never will mislead us. "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not." It is He who "lighteth every man that cometh into the world." What! savages, heathens, idolaters? "Every man," without exception. Conscience reveals itself, in early childhood, in every human being. It is generally styled "the moral faculty," and considered a part of the mind, as much as reason, or memory, or imagination. The text shows that it is *not* a faculty, but a Divine light in the soul, distinct from the soul or mind itself. What we call instinct in the lower animals is the direct suggestion of the Creator, moving them to answer the purposes for which they exist. Now as instinct is distinct from, and governs, any reflective powers possessed by them, so conscience is distinct from, and is intended to govern, the high mental faculties possessed by man. What, then, does this Divine light, this Shekinah in the soul, reveal to "every man"? It reveals to every man that he ought to "walk in the light,"—in other words, that he ought to *be good*. It reveals this antecedently to any process of reasoning.

Much perplexity has arisen from confounding reason with conscience. The Divine light must always and everywhere be one and the same. Its teaching, therefore, must always and everywhere be the same. But what one

man (according to common parlance) conscientiously holds to be right, another conscientiously holds to be wrong. Is the light of conscience in these men different? Can "the true light" lead some into error? Impossible! It is Divine and unchangeable, and must ever teach what is divinely excellent. It teaches that *we ought to be good.* It teaches this in the mind of each of these men thus differing in their conclusions. Whence, then, their difference? Why have they not come to one conclusion? It may be because their reason (the logical faculty) is not equally powerful, or it may be because their knowledge (from which, when presented by the understanding, the logical faculty decides) is not equally extensive,—or it may be from both these causes combined. Conscience, being itself Divine, is in every man an unerring guide, but it does not interfere with reason. It leaves every man to inform his understanding and exercise his reason according to his opportunities. It simply teaches every man, whether he be well-informed or ill-informed, that he *ought to be good,*—in other words, that his character and conduct ought to be such as will bear the light. I am not aware that there is any other way of reconciling the text with what we know to be facts in human nature and human history.

But if conscience teaches that we *ought to be good,* this teaching, if obeyed, will stimulate us constantly to use all our faculties and opportunities to ascertain *what* is good. To aid us in this inquiry, "God at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake unto the fathers by the prophets," and subsequently "spake unto us by his Son;" and He gives us His Holy Spirit to co-operate with our natural faculties in the study of His word and works. This communication of the Holy Spirit is real, although in general we are not conscious of it, because we are unable to distinguish the operations of our minds from the operations of the Spirit. But, whether we are conscious of it or not, we are entitled and bound to believe that it is real, because the union between Christ, our Divine Head, and all His members is effected and maintained through the communication of the Holy Spirit,

and also because we observe that changes are being gradually wrought within us by the sanctifying power of this Divine Presence.

The true light shining in every man, and the cherished indwelling of the Holy Ghost, must be Divine influences of the same kind. "The true light which lighteth every man" is Christ. That is plain. Now "God and man is one Christ." Christ, as man, is at the right-hand of the Father; Christ, as God, is omnipresent. Wherever the Son is, as God, there also is the Father, and there also is the Holy Spirit.

The text affirms that Christ is "the true light which lighteth every man." We cannot suppose that this began to be true only at the time of our Lord's advent in the flesh. The light of conscience shone in the human mind before the Incarnation as really as after it; therefore it must be as God that Christ "lighteth every man," and this Divine light must always have been the same *in kind* as the light given by the indwelling of the Divine Spirit. But where the Spirit dwells and rules, welcomed and cherished by the soul, there is more than light,—there is also abounding love. The light is accompanied by great warmth (if we may so speak),—warmth that melts the heart, sets the affections free, gives them a heavenward direction, quickens the whole soul, and fills it with a loving zeal for whatever is good, and true, and godlike. Christ, the federal "Head of every man," being already vitally one with all Christians, whatever in Christ is communicable flows into their souls, according to their God-given capacity to receive, and gradually transforms them into His likeness. It is thus, by the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son, that we become "partakers of the Divine nature," which is the highest glory, the sublimest privilege to which created beings can aspire.

We often read in theological books that conscience and all the faculties of our minds have been corrupted and weakened by the fall of our first parents. The statement is contradicted both by Scripture and by experience. We are not aware of any "true light that lighteth every man," except the light of what is popularly called conscience.

That light, being Divine, must ever be pure and perfect. Therefore to say that conscience has been corrupted is to contradict our text. We do indeed read in Scripture of a "weak conscience," in the sense of over-scrupulousness; also of "conscience seared with a hot iron," "conscience defiled," "an evil conscience,"—expressions indicating the dire effects of obstinately disregarding the light of conscience. In these passages, however, it is obvious that popular language is used, without any thought of scientific precision. The word is employed with so little attention to this kind of exactness that, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, *conscience* is used for *consciousness*, which is the original meaning of the word (*συνείδησις*), commonly translated *conscience*; "no more conscience of sins" being equivalent to *no more consciousness of guilt* (Heb. x. 2). In several instances the word *consciousness* would have given the sense more correctly in English. "If a man for conscience toward God endure grief" (*διὰ συνείδησιν Θεοῦ*) might be rendered quite literally, *through consciousness of God* (1 Pet. ii. 19). "With conscience of the idol" (*τῇ συνειδήσει τοῦ εἰδώλου*) ought to be, *with the consciousness of the idol*, if we translate word for word, the sense being that there was a consciousness of the influence of the idol, as if it had been something real, and injurious to the meat (1 Cor. viii. 7). The free manner in which the word *conscience* is used in our authorized version does not affect the present inquiry. The Divine light shines in us as it shone in Adam before the Fall. The difference lies in this: before the Fall, the light was always cheerfully followed, whereas now our natural inclination is to disregard it.

And have we any ground for supposing that our faculty of reason has been directly corrupted or weakened? Is man less qualified now to deal with mathematical truth, for example, than he was before the Fall? I see no proof of that.

Sin has, indeed, raised something like a mist around the human mind,—a blinding mist which hinders us from seeing the grander aspects of nature and the higher forms of spiritual truth. It does not prevent us from understanding mathematics or logic, but it does prevent

us from seeing the love, the goodness, the wisdom of God shining clearly through all His works and all His dispensations. If we deliberately choose to live in an atmosphere of sin, thinking sinful thoughts, cherishing sinful emotions, delighting in sinful desires, and doing sinful acts, we shut ourselves out from that kind of knowledge which is highest, grandest, best, because spiritual and divine. We choose to remain in the very thickest of the mist, where we cannot see beyond our feet, when we might, by an effort of the will (which God is ready to help and bless), emerge from this most unsatisfactory and perilous position into one comparatively satisfactory and perfectly safe. On earth we cannot be entirely free from the effects of sin. We still continue to be in the outskirts of the mist. But any one who has had experience of mists or fogs knows the vast difference there is between being in the heart of one and being merely in the outskirts of it. In the former case you can see nothing around you but the mist itself, even in broad day; you are enveloped in what may be called translucent darkness. In the latter case you see the general features of the landscape, and you discover exactly where you are, although you still continue to see through a veil which more or less obscures your vision. If, then, you deliberately prefer to live in sin, what is this but choosing darkness rather than light? What is it but choosing to be blindfolded by the god of this dispensation? It is not possible to speak intelligibly of such things without using figurative language; but let no one make the great mistake of supposing that these things are not real,—that the soul and the spiritual world, because invisible, are less real than the body and the material world.

Our corruption, as fallen creatures, consists in this, that we love darkness rather than light,—that we shrink from "the true light," as Adam did when he tried to hide from God among the trees of the garden,—that we are now naturally inclined to take pleasure in what we know to be contrary both to conscience and to reason, and therefore contrary to our real interest in the long-run.

Reason is the mental instrument with which God has

endowed us for the discovery of truth. It is probably as powerful now as ever it was. A man's eyesight may be perfectly sound when he is shut up in the densest fog. But our evil inclinations often prevent us from exercising our reason on subjects which are distasteful, be they ever so important, and from obeying it when its decisions are unwelcome. The consequences of this are dreadful.

Conscience, then, is distinct from reason. Conscience is not an instrument for the discovery of truth, yet it helps us to *recognize* moral and spiritual truth, as will be shown presently. It is the divine light in the human mind, simply *bearing witness to the eternal obligation of goodness and truth.* (2 Cor. i. 12.)

The true relations of reason and conscience may to some extent be illustrated by the analogy of a court of justice. Reason is the judge who approves or condemns. Over against the judgment-seat is written in characters of light, "FOLLOW THAT WHICH IS GOOD."* This is the ever-living Word of God, the essence of that law which reflects the Divine image. This is the law written in the heart. This is the authoritative standard by which Reason is bound in every case to decide. This is God revealing Himself by the Divine Word in the soul. This is the Shekinah. In a well-governed mind, Will represents the executive, and carries out the sentence of Reason. Thought, Word, and Deed are at the bar. Inclination commonly pleads in defence of Guilt. The Understanding presents the facts of the case to the Judge. If the Understanding is vigorous and well-informed, it exposes the false pleas of corrupt Inclination; if the Understanding is weak or ill-informed, it may accede to those false pleas, or otherwise misstate the facts; and, despite the shining of the divine light, may mislead Reason as to what is, or is not, *good.* And thus the Will, carrying out a wrong decision, produces conduct which is of necessity also wrong. This explains the errors of an individual in whom a strong Will determines to follow that which is right or good.

But, in most minds, the Will is *not* determined to

* 1 Thess. v. 15; John iii. 11.

follow that which is good. On the contrary, it favours Inclination, listens gladly to the arguments of that earnest pleader, and promptly acts upon them; disregarding the facts presented by the Understanding, and the decisions uttered by the Reason in the presence of the Shekinah, or, as we say, *in foro Conscientiæ*,—in the court of Conscience,—which is the King's court. This is the state of "the carnal mind" which "is enmity against God."

Conscience does not instruct us in certain dogmas or solve particular difficulties. It simply bears witness divinely in the soul to the eternal obligation of goodness or rectitude; leaving the faculties of the soul itself to determine what is good or right. And, blessed be God! responsibility is measured by opportunity. (St. Luke xii. 47, 48.)

In the tabernacle, above the ark (which contained the stone tables of the moral law), the Shekinah, or luminous cloud, continually shone, betokening the special presence of Jehovah the Angel,—God manifested,—Christ in His pre-incarnate glory. That same Christ, God our Creator, is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Conscience is His witness in every soul, as the Shekinah was, within the veil, in the most holy place of the tabernacle. The Lord said unto Moses, "I will appear in the cloud, upon the mercy-seat."—"And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee." In every human soul, the Lord, "the true light," in like manner, reveals Himself as the eternal author of goodness and truth. By His presence there, He says, "Walk in the light."—"*Follow that which is good.*" The light of His divine presence within, keeps before us our obligation to follow goodness and truth to the utmost extent of our knowledge and ability. This applies to every individual of the human race. Men's ideas of goodness vary, according to modifying circumstances of education, habit, custom, and temperament. But the obligation of each to follow what he believes to be right, is, more or less, distinctly discernible by all, without exception.

Another point of great importance must here be noticed. The divine origin and character of "the true light" in the soul are proved by *the immediate consequences of walking in the light, or of turning away from it*, and walking in darkness. These consequences demonstrate that He, whose light is the conscience, created the soul in which it shines. When the will carries out the decision of the reason, informed by the understanding, and overruling the pleas of corrupt inclination, we find that a feeling of satisfaction and pleasure pervades the whole soul, showing that it is so far acting in harmony with the will of its benevolent Creator, who designed it with a view to its happiness. But, on the other hand, when the will disregards the decisions of the reason, judging according to the light of conscience, a feeling of dissatisfaction and pain is the result; showing that the soul is *not* acting in harmony with the will of its Creator. We are aware, in such a case, that we are doing violence to our higher nature, that we are transgressing a law; and this brings a consciousness of guilt and danger, which is always painful, however much we may try to suppress it. Yet the feeling of dissatisfaction and pain, in the one case, as well as the feeling of satisfaction and pleasure, in the other, is, surely, something wholly distinct from the light of conscience, which has been followed or rejected; as distinct as the pleasure of walking safely in the sunshine, or the pain of stumbling among pitfalls in the darkness, is from the sunshine itself. It seems wonderful, that things in every respect so different should ever have been confounded. The feeling of satisfaction or dissatisfaction, far from having its seat, as has been generally supposed, in a single faculty, affects the whole mental economy. No part of the mind is exempted from its influence. Christ is God manifested in the soul. Christ is the divine law manifested in the soul, the law written in the heart. Christ is "the true light which lighteth every man." And just in proportion as the present God is recognized, and the true light is followed, the *whole* soul enjoys a heavenly satisfaction, some degree of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding"

But reason which judges, and the understanding which presents the case to the reason, need to be instructed as to the character of God, the nature of that law which reflects His character, the method of reconciliation after transgressions of the law, and the means of establishing permanently in the soul the authority of the law, and thus securing the peace which follows obedience. For this purpose, God has given us the written word, recorded in Holy Scripture, to *interpret and supplement the law written in the heart.* Herein lies our high privilege as Christians. Its value cannot easily be exaggerated, unless by maintaining, what the Scriptures do not teach, that there can be no salvation without it. The Scriptures teach that there *may* be salvation without it. (Acts x. 35; Rom. ii. 14, 15.) Had Enoch, Noah, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph a Bible?

The Bible contains the written word; Christ is the living word. The written word in the Bible never can contradict the living word in the soul. It is chiefly the presence of the living word in the soul that enables us to recognize, as divine, the written word in the Bible, and helps us to distinguish what is divine from what is human. When we speak of conscience as the divine light in the soul, we use a figurative expression. We mean that there is within us a divine influence, which is to the soul what light is to the bodily eye. We may, with equal propriety speak of conscience as God's *voice* in the soul; for Christ is there, and He is the living word. Now, when God's voice in the written word enters the soul, it instantly blends in harmony with the voice of the living word, that is, of conscience. In the ear of reason the harmony is delightful. And the harmony is made richer, and more delightful, when other voices, also divine, come from other parts of our nature, as well as from science and history and experience, and blend as in a perfect chord. For example, when we read, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."—"Execute true judgments, and show mercy and compassion every man to his brother: and oppress not the widow nor the fatherless, the

stranger nor the poor: and let none of you *imagine* evil against his brother *in your heart;*" here the voice of God in the written word blends in perfect harmony with the voice of conscience, and with other divine voices that make themselves heard in various departments of the works and ways of God.

On the other hand, when the principle of any action, instead of agreeing with conscience, is repugnant to it, when, instead of harmony in the cultivated ear of Reason, discord is the result of bringing the two together, then it is certain that the principle *cannot have the authority of God.* To illustrate this, I refer you to the story of the murder of Sisera by Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kenite. It is read in the regular course of the Sunday-morning lessons; and I have no doubt that many a startled listener supposes Jael to have acted under a *divine* impulse. The commendation of the transaction, and the exultation over its consequences, contained in the Song of Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam, are likely to give this impression. The Scripture, however, does not say that Jael acted under divine direction: nor does it say that the Song of Deborah and Barak was anything more than their enthusiastic exultation over a national success. It is true that Deborah is called a prophetess; but we know that persons, endowed with the gift even of predictive prophecy, sometimes fell into great errors, and great sins. Whatever explanation may be given of the Song, it is blasphemy to suppose that God, infinitely holy, directed a person to commit a treacherous murder, or that He approved the murder after it had been committed. It is one of the most aggravated cases of crime recorded in history. The decision of all sorts and conditions of men, as soon as the circumstances are stated, condemns the deed as atrocious. The voice of conscience says, "*Follow that which is good.*" God will not contradict in His written word what He Himself as the living Word proclaims in every soul which He has made. "Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said unto him, turn in, my lord, turn in to me; fear not." He was fleeing before his victorious enemy, and he gladly

accepted the offered protection, "for there was peace between Jabin the king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite." After she had given him to drink from a bottle of milk, he fell asleep. "Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died." He was her husband's ally: he was her invited guest: while he continued awake, he was treated as her guest; he was in the sanctuary of a woman's tent: he was confiding and defenceless; yet, when he fell asleep, this woman, with the blackest treachery, took advantage of his confidence and helplessness, and murdered him. And if the crime was horrible, can anything be more shocking than the manner in which the Song commended it? "Blessed above women shall Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, be; blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workman's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed; he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead. The mother of Sisera looked out at a window" (the utter heartlessness of this allusion, by a woman, to the mother of the murdered man is appalling) "and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why tarry the wheels of his chariots?' etc.

There is something very awful in the state of feeling which this Song expresses. It teaches us *how blinded by passion the minds even of religious persons may be.* And it teaches us that there may be such a thing as "orthodox lying for God:" for the Song concludes with a remarkable prayer:—"So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord! but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might." None who really love God, will cause His enemies to perish by treachery and murder, and continue to look back upon such baseness with satis-

faction. To imagine that God can be served by breaking His own Law, written in His Word, and written in the heart, is a delusion. A prophet is but a man, a prophetess but a woman; and, as in the case of Jonah, so in the case of Deborah, we see that when left to themselves they may be impious and cruel. Jonah's rebellious speeches against God, and Deborah's vengeful song, exulting over an aggravated murder, are recorded in Holy Scripture, not, surely, for our approval, but for our instruction. They show that the human heart is "deceitful above all things," as well as "desperately wicked;" and that one may think he is showing his zeal for the Lord when he is doing the work of the Devil. How, then, are we to discriminate between those parts of Scripture which record what we are to imitate, and those parts which record what we are to avoid? By exercising our reason in the light of conscience. Conscience is a divine light, which can lead no man astray. This is "the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world." Without the exercise of reason, even the Bible itself would be unintelligible and useless. "Believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light."

IV.

SOLID HAPPINESS.

"He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."—*Psalm* cxii. 7.

THIS is the privilege of the good man. Surely there is something grand and lofty in such an attitude as his. He looks up to an Almighty Father. He looks around upon his Father's works. He looks within, and finds a hearty desire to be what his Father would have him to be, and to do what his Father would have him to do. He asks himself, "Why should I be afraid? Afraid of evil tidings? No tidings can be in reality evil to me. God's will is my will. Afraid of accidents? What men call accidents are no accidents at all. Every circumstance that arises, every occurrence that takes place, has been provided for in an infinite scheme, and all occurrences, with all their circumstances, even the most minute, are overruled for good to them that love God." So that, in truth, the man who believes this cannot help seeing that there would be a kind of absurdity in his being afraid,—a denial of the principles in which his life is rooted. At peace with God through Jesus Christ, and yet afraid of evil tidings! No! That peace and that fear cannot co-exist in any mind. Where the peace, the security, is imperfectly realized, the fear may be more or less felt. But that must be because the heart is wavering, not "fixed"—of little faith, and not thoroughly "trusting in the Lord."

Now, in intellectual matters, we esteem that mind the greatest which can take the largest view, which shows capacity for grasping a subject as a whole, without overlooking details. And nobody can doubt that this is a right way of measuring mental power in science, art, criticism, and so forth. Go a step higher, and apply the test. Is not that man the wisest who considers his life as a whole, and regulates its details with reference not to this infancy of our being merely, but to our immortal destiny? Nay more, is not he who considers this life only,—who acts as if this brief span were the whole, instead of being merely a first step, guilty of the most enormous folly? Can words express such folly? Is not the real extent of it, if measured by the vastness of the consequences, too great even for imagination to conceive? The more you think of it, the more startling, the more tremendous it will appear to be.

On an average, about eighty-nine thousand persons die every twenty-four hours. When we hear of the sudden death of a few thousands by an earthquake, a volcano, or a cyclone, we are appalled at such an awful destruction of human life; and it is right that we should be appalled, and solemnized, and stirred up to reflection by such terrible events. But, after all, the deaths by such a calamity are a mere item in the daily mortality that is going on, silently, steadily, yet scarcely thought of. Souls are passing away at the rate of about one per second, or sixty per minute, from January to December. And yet how few care to consider this unquestioned fact! how few try so to number their days that they may apply their hearts unto wisdom! Of us who have reached manhood or womanhood, how many will be under ground, or in the depths of the sea, within the next few years! And after a few years more, the longest-lived of us all shall have passed away. Then these bodies, about the health and comfort of which we are so anxious, will be no more to us than are now the clothes we wore twenty, or thirty, or forty years ago.

Are you prepared for this? Are you living with reference to this most certain result? Are you considering

your life as a whole, and attending to your education? We are really but in the infancy of our being, and this world is little more than an infant school, covered with picture lessons, favoured with Divine teaching suited to our capacity, and often resounding with most varied music. There are present enjoyments for the good, and present sufferings for the bad; foreshadowings of what will be in the future. In proportion as by faith we enter into the reality of Christian truth, we shall become good; in proportion as we look unto Jesus, we shall be saved from the curse and dominion of sin; in proportion as we love Him who first loved us, we shall be filled with the sense of His love,—filled with the blessed consciousness of His presence, as our God, our guide, our guardian,—filled with the transforming graces of His Spirit, strengthened against every slavish fear, and enabled to realize, more and more as we grow older, the solid happiness of having our hearts fixed, trusting in the Lord.

Yes, gainsay it who will, that is solid happiness,—to have our hearts fixed, trusting in the Lord. Now we know only in part, and we must trust God for the rest. We see enough to prove to us that the God revealed in Jesus Christ is loving and merciful, as well as just and almighty. Therefore we may safely trust in Him; we may rest perfectly assured that He doeth all things well,—that all His plans and arrangements will prove in the end to be absolutely right, the very best that were possible. But we must remember continually the limitations that have been put upon our present knowledge. Now we know in part, and therefore we can teach or learn only in part. And we shall see by-and-by, if not now, that it was all right that this should have been so. There is a great difference between an infant school and a university. What is allowed and encouraged in the one, might be utterly unsuitable, and therefore wrong, in the other. Here we have our toys and games and wondrous inventions, to amuse and interest and employ us,—all intended for us by our Father, and all useful for our development if they be kept in their own place. Our nature has to be trained for eternal service, and any lower view of the

matter is unworthy of a rational being created in God's image. But little children must not be cross and querulous because they cannot understand everything, and because many things which they might be able to understand are not at once explained to them. In short, we must for the present "breathe and live in the cloud, content to see it opening here and closing there." We must accept God's method with humbleness of mind. He requires us to believe nothing that is contrary to our reason and conscience. It is only sects and bigots, as blind as they are confident, that attempt to do that. We are to be humble in the presence of what is really God's word and what is really His work: but we are not to bow the head and bend the knee before proud dogmatists among our fellows, and come creeping into their presence without daring to look up, as the Siamese officials approach their princes. God forbid! That is mean, base, contemptible servility, disgusting to every right-minded man who has ever breathed the air of liberty.

But in the presence of God, His word and His works, humbleness of mind is not only proper and becoming, but delightful. It is a glorious thought that we are to be learning something new every day, for ever and ever,—in other words, that there is an infinite variety of such pleasures to come. What folly, then, to murmur at the limitations which God has been pleased to put upon our present knowledge! The dimness of the sealed eye and the slumbering soul is one thing; the dimness inseparable from all infinite subjects, even before the open eye and the waking, active, inquiring soul, is another and a very different thing.

The lesson is this:—A good man, unless he be weak, will dread nothing in the universe but sin. From that he will shrink and turn away, as from what is corrupt and hateful and most perilous. But in all the acts and methods of Providence he will endeavour calmly to acquiesce, because he knows that God is love, and hates nothing that He hath made; that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all; that God is omniscient, seeing the end as well as the beginning and all the links, which

we do not; and that God is almighty, and therefore able to carry out into perfection all the counsels of infinite love. For these reasons, which are abundantly sufficient, he will aim to live as an obedient and trustful child in this lower apartment of his Father's house; he will be continually inquiring, but never peevish or fretful because the answers are too high for him, or because the answer is silence; he will submit his will to God's will, resting in his Father's love, and rejoicing in his Father's favour; and however difficult his path at times may be, however gloomy his near prospects, however trying to flesh and blood his actual surroundings at the moment, "he shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

V.

THE TRUTH.

"The truth shall make you free."—*St. John* viii. 32.

MEN's opinions vary, like the shapes of passing clouds; but truth is unchangeable and eternal. Nothing can be so important to a man as his own destiny; and the knowledge of such truth as relates to this, must be to him the most important of all knowledge. One proof of our immortality is our constant aspiration after perfect knowledge; but it is also the cause of many errors. Although we are aware that absolute perfection is unattainable, we cannot be satisfied with anything that is incomplete. If we have a plan or a theory that interests us, we desire to make it a complete whole, like a circle, or a square, or an equilateral triangle, faultless and symmetrical. But our acquaintance with many subjects is so limited, that we cannot form perfectly round, or square, or equilateral theories concerning them, without putting guesses here and there instead of ascertained facts. If the guesses are wrong, as often happens, the theory in hand must be more or less unsound and untrustworthy. A dishonest or ignorant wheelwright may be the cause of killing or maiming a coachful of passengers, by concealing the defects of a wheel with putty and paint and varnish; and a dishonest or ignorant theologian may be the cause of inconceivable mischief to those who trust his theory, which has been put together on similar principles.

"The truth shall make you free."

What *is* "the truth"? There are various kinds of truth. Of what kind of truth does our Saviour here speak? Or may we suppose that all kinds are included? That He refers to speculative and physical truth, as well as to that which is moral or spiritual? Let us not be over-hasty in coming to a conclusion. There are unfathomable depths of meaning in many of the divine sentences of our Lord. In promising the extraordinary descent of the Holy Ghost, Jesus said, "When he, the spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth." That the spiritual truth connected with our Saviour's advent, its purpose and its consequences, were here primarily intended, will hardly be questioned; but the meaning may, in its widest bearings, reach immeasurably further. In any case, a gradual process is implied, a gradual communication adapted to a gradually increasing capacity. "He will guide you into all truth," must be interpreted, He will *begin* to guide you. The actual result limits the interpretation, even if we take it for granted that only spiritual truth is contemplated in the words. The Apostles themselves were not suddenly made acquainted with "all truth," even on the day of Pentecost. They were supernaturally illuminated, and supernaturally endowed, in a far greater degree than they had previously been. But their ideas of spiritual truth differed on various occasions during their subsequent career; which proves that they were not all equally enlightened. The Spirit was to lead them into all truth, from step to step, according to the spiritual strength and capacity of each disciple; and this training, this education of the higher nature, instead of terminating at death, was to be carried on afterwards in a higher sphere, and on a grander scale, in circumstances incomparably more favourable to the progress of knowledge, by reason of the entire absence of the causes of ignorance and error.

Our Lord said, "I am the truth."—"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." In another place

we read, "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." A comparison of these texts clearly shows that error and its consequences were "the works of the devil," which Christ came to destroy. Again, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." St. John, speaking of Him, says, "That was the true light, which lighteth every man;" and, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, He is declared to be "the brightness of the Father's glory." The light of truth in Jesus was opposed to the darkness of error. He, who is the truth, came to destroy the works of him who is a liar, and the father of lies. And "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil."

When the Son of God is called "the light of the world," "the true light that lighteth every man," and "the brightness of the Father's glory," these are different forms of announcing Him to be the fountain of truth. He, Himself, says, in so many words, "I am the truth."

So that the fountain of truth, the very truth itself, the heart and soul, and origin and essence of every right principle in every department of knowledge, whether it refers to things visible or things invisible, is now accessible to us, since God hath become "manifest in the flesh."

Now Christ is God; and Christ says, "I am the truth." St. John says, "God is light," and "God is love." What follows? Even this, that divine truth, and divine light, and divine love are essentially one; that they are inseparable; that where one is, the others must be; and that wherever the Omnipresent God is, they all must be. Infinite truth, infinite light, infinite love, eternally united,—this is the nearest approach to a definition of Deity that we find in the Bible.

Attributes of Deity are often referred to, which, although inseparable from truth, light, and love, are distinguishable from them. Thus, we understand that mercy is not the same quality as truth, and that justice

is not the same as love. But we nowhere read, God is mercy, God is justice. That mercy and justice are divine attributes we know for certain. But neither the one nor the other is given as a definition of Deity (if the expression is allowable). On the other hand, God "manifest in the flesh," hath Himself proclaimed to the race whose nature He condescended to assume, "I am the truth;" and an inspired Apostle, as if he would make us understand what our Lord meant by "the truth," gives us the two aspects of it in these simple words, "God is light," "God is love." Light and love may be called the analysis of truth. In order that we may worship God intelligently, and entertain correct notions of His providential dealings with mankind, it is necessary that we should have, as far as our capacity permits, a right idea of His character. If He is represented as an arbitrary, capricious, and exacting tyrant, we, who are "His offspring," cannot regard Him as a loving father, cannot obey Him from the blessed motive of filial love. Inquiries concerning the divine character are no barren speculation. God's character must be the foundation of all our hopes. It is of immense consequence, therefore, to be able to rest assured, that, whatever His other attributes may be, they are consistent with this most comforting revelation,—"God is love." No fact in the universe can contradict this, although many facts may present difficulties which we are unable to explain.

The knowledge of the truth, then, is mainly the knowledge of Christ, of God "manifest in the flesh." In Him "are hid all the treasures of wisdom." These are "the unsearchable riches of Christ," which Paul preached to the Gentiles. "The truth as it is in Jesus," is the truth which makes us free; truth resulting from infinite light and infinite love; truth revealed to us in the incarnation, the life, the works, the words, the sufferings, the death, the resurrection, the ascension, of our Lord and Saviour; truth also revealed to us by His inward shining as "the true light" in our conscience, by the operation of His Holy Spirit in the soul, and by the history of His works and ways from the beginning.

For twenty-five centuries after the creation of our first parents, there was (so far as we know) no written record of divine revelation. The Book of Genesis was written, it is generally supposed, about fifteen centuries before the advent of Christ; possibly, later.

During those twenty-five centuries, oral tradition appears to have been the only method of conveying from one generation to another whatever knowledge God was pleased to communicate by extraordinary revelation to our first parents, and to others in the early ages. Oral tradition, however, was then greatly favoured by the protracted lives of those who transmitted it. When Adam died, Methuselah was about 200 years old. When Methuselah died, Shem was nearly 100. When Shem died, Abraham was about 150. So that, if these figures are correct, the tradition of God's dealings with Adam and Eve, in Paradise, and after their expulsion from it, need have passed only through two hands from Adam to Abraham. From the time of Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob, the twelve patriarchs and their descendants, God's elect people, the knowledge of the true God was preserved by tradition in Canaan and Egypt until the time of Moses, who certainly wrote a great part of the Pentateuch. During those twenty-five centuries, although there were individuals eminent for piety, and favoured in some instances with direct revelations, the knowledge of spiritual truth possessed by the masses must have been extremely limited, as we know that in general they lapsed into idolatry and all manner of wickedness. Natural religion, derived from the light of conscience, from the conclusions of reason, and from the study of God's works of creation and providence, has ever proved utterly inadequate to purify the character, or satisfy the yearnings, of even the most civilized of heathen nations. The imaginary gods worshipped by the Greeks and Romans were believed by the worshippers to be infamous for the most enormous crimes. The rites called "the holy mysteries of Ceres and Bacchus" were so vile and shameful, that the worshippers "became more degraded in proportion as they became more religious." In short, the his-

tory of the world proves that, in the absence of direct revelation from God, the most frightful cruelty and the most abominable licentiousness have been the prevailing characteristics of every nation under heaven.

Yet it by no means follows, because the teaching of conscience and reason and God's works of creation and providence is not of itself sufficient to lead mankind to the knowledge, worship, and service of the only God our Creator, that therefore what has been styled natural religion is useless. The case is far otherwise. But it is quite true that natural religion derives its chief value from the light reflected on it by what has been revealed in Holy Scripture. At the same time, it has a province of its own; and it renders inestimable service in the interpretation of Scripture. God constantly appeals to man, as bound to judge for himself of the equity of the divine proceedings, as bound to use his reason, in the light of conscience, and to act upon the conclusions thus arrived at.

"The language of nature," says an acute writer,* "is most certainly the language of God, the sole Author of Nature. We should always interpret Scripture in a sense consistent with the laws of natural religion; or with the known perfections of God, and the notions of right and wrong, good and evil, which are discoverable in the works of creation and the present constitution of things. But mistake me not. I do not mean that the law or religion of Nature is commensurate with revelation; or that nothing is to be admitted in revelation but what is discoverable by the light of Nature, or by human reason. Revelation, properly so called, could never have been discovered by human reason. And therefore, in matters of pure revelation, it is a very false and fallacious way to begin, first, with what our reason may dictate and discover; because our reason, unassisted by revelation, in such cases, can discover nothing at all. For instance, the consequences of Adam's transgression upon his posterity; the covenant made with Abraham; the nature and mission of the Son of God; the grant of

* Dr. J. Taylor, 1762.

blessings and eternal life by Him;—concerning these things we could have known nothing at all, had not God revealed them to us. And, in such matters of pure revelation, the first thing we have to do is, to inquire, not what human reason can discover, but what God has discovered and declared in Scripture. But at the same time it is true, that God has revealed nothing in Scripture inconsistent with what He has revealed in nature."

Now we say that revealed religion is contained in Holy Scripture; and it is common to speak of the whole Bible as the Word of God, or Revelation. How is this to be understood? In what way have the Scriptures come to us from God? They have not come down to us from heaven, or the summit of Sinai, like the Ten Commandments, engraved by the finger of God on tables of stone. In what sense, then, have they come to us from God?

I answer,—God made direct communications at various times to patriarchs, prophets, and others; under the Old Testament dispensation; and, in His Providence, He caused to be recorded in books by chosen men many of those communications of His will, and especially His dealings with Abraham and his descendants. In "the fulness of time" He sent His only-begotten Son Jesus Christ to teach the divine will by precept, parable, miracle, and example; to die as a sacrifice "for the sins of the whole world;" to rise from the dead, and to ascend into heaven. On the day of Pentecost, after His ascension, the Holy Ghost was communicated in an extraordinary manner and degree to the Apostles and others. Two inspired Apostles, and two other disciples, wrote separate accounts of our Saviour's earthly career. Five inspired Apostles wrote Epistles for the instruction of the Church; and one of these, St. John, was favoured in Patmos with the visions recorded in the Apocalypse. All these Books are received, on the strongest historical testimony; and the volume in which they are bound together is rightly called *the* Book, because it is, beyond comparison, the most instructive, the most wonderful, and the most valuable, that has ever appeared in the world,—containing as it does a large revelation of the mind of God, on subjects

of deep and eternal interest to the human race. Above all, it is in the Bible that we are made acquainted with what we know concerning the divine "Saviour of the world," the incarnate "Word of God," who said of Himself, "I am the Truth."

It is the Messiah Himself, our Divine Lord, who is in the highest and strictest sense "the Word of God." "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and *the Word was God.*" All the personal and direct manifestations of God recorded in the Old Testament were vouchsafed through God the Son; and by the Holy Ghost, who proceeded from the Father and the Son, the prophets were inspired. The New Testament is a history of the advent of God the Son in the flesh, and of events and revelations consequent thereupon. The Bible, therefore, is really the written Word of God, in so far as it reflects in human language the Divine Word, now at the right-hand of the Majesty on High, God revealing Himself in the person of His Son, clothed in our nature, united to us and communicating with us by His Spirit. The Bible is the *only* written record of Divine revelation: and, whatever questions may be raised concerning the canon,—the nature and extent of inspiration,—the age or purity of certain parts of the sacred text,—chronology,—and such points, certain it is that the Providence of God in the preservation of the Scriptures has been of a most remarkable kind; that they have been for many centuries "profitable" to millions of humble souls "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;" that they have done incomparably more to purify and elevate the human race than all other literature besides; that the study of them, with earnest prayer, is always accompanied or followed by a happy consciousness of the divine presence and favour; and that, without them (unless God had substituted some other supernatural means), we must have been, eighteen centuries after the advent of Christ, much in the dark as to the Way of Salvation.

The tendency of "the Truth," in whatever way communicated to the soul, is to enlighten and make us free.

We can imagine many ways in which God might have been pleased to reveal His will to nations, families, and individuals, without any necessity for the inspiration of human writers.

He might have printed a daily lesson on a heavenly arch, like the rainbow, so that each nation might read His instruction daily in its own language.

He might have printed on every leaf of every tree, and on every petal of every flower, in legible and intelligible words, lessons of heavenly wisdom.

He might have written on the glassy surface of the sea, in characters of phosphorescent light, nightly revelations of His will to them that sail in ships upon the deep, or dwell by the shores of ocean.

He might have arranged the motions of the stars in such a manner that their combinations should have made the midnight sky a printed book, with instruction adapted to the capacity and varying with the circumstances of each succeeding generation.

He might have said, "I will answer every sincere prayer of a nation by articulate words in the thunder, so that all shall hear and none can fail to know what is spoken."

He might have said, "I will answer every sincere prayer of a family by writing upon the wall of their dwelling," as at Belshazzar's feast.

He might have said, "I will answer every sincere prayer of an individual, however obscure or unworthy he may be, by legible characters upon the palms of his hands."

Persons may think that some one or all of these methods would have been more satisfactory and more convincing than the method which God has adopted. Yet none of these methods would have been a perfect means of communication between the mind of God and the mind of man, for language is an imperfect medium, and the plainest words are liable to be misinterpreted.

Moreover, to deny that the method which God *has* adopted is, upon the whole, the best of all possible methods, is to deny His infinite wisdom,—is to say that

a better, and therefore a wiser, scheme might have been chosen. Accordingly, none of the methods now mentioned of revealing God's will would have answered His purpose so well as the method He *has* taken; and, if any one presumes to think otherwise, it must be because he does not understand the whole of the Divine scheme.

What, then, is the method which God has adopted to reveal His will to man?

He has given us Conscience, "the true light which lighteth every man."

He has given us Reason, which is bound to judge in the light of conscience.

He has given us the book of Nature.

He has given us the book of Providence.

He has given us the book of books, the Bible.

He has given us His Son, "the Word of God," "the Truth."

He has given us His Spirit to "help our infirmities" and gradually to "guide us into all truth."

II. "The truth shall make you free." *Whom* shall the Truth make free? "Jesus said to those Jews which believed in him, If ye continue in my word [*i.e.* "if ye abide in me," St. John xv. 7], then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." Again, "If any man *will do* his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." And the Psalmist, even under a darker dispensation, enunciated the same principle when he said, "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show *them* his covenant." The substance of these texts is this, that obedience to known truth is a condition without which we are not entitled to expect progress in knowledge. It is by reasoning and acting upon the principles of known truth that we advance to that which has hitherto been unknown, even in science and art. The same rule, we are assured, holds good with reference to higher knowledge. Continuing in Christ's word, doing God's will, and fearing to offend our Heavenly Father, imply at least a constant endeavour to obey what God has revealed as His will, so far as we know it. In pro-

portion as we endeavour to do this, our views of duty will become clear, and we shall be made free by the truth: for we shall abide in Christ, the Divine Word, the sublimest revelation, the manifestation of Deity, of infinite light, infinite love, and infinite truth. And what is it to abide in Christ? It is to trust in Him, to live in Him, to draw our life and nourishment and strength from Him, as branches from the vine, and, as healthful branches, to bring forth the fruits of righteousness to the glory of God, our Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. This is to abide in Christ, to continue in His word, and to be made free by the truth.

III. And from what shall the truth make us free?—this truth which is identical with Christ Himself,—"the truth as it is in Jesus"? It will free us from bondage to earthly masters, earthborn systems, the carnality of ceremonies, and the superstitions of fanaticism. Above all, it will free us from bondage to sin. We shall no longer be under sin's dominion. We shall resist it, and in the strength of Christ we shall ultimately conquer it.

Yes, "the truth as it is in Jesus" will make us free from bigotry, sectarianism, narrowness, and the pharisaical temper begotten of ignorance and nursed by pride,—lamentable weaknesses which dispose creatures who "are but of yesterday and know nothing" to put under the ban of their displeasure, and, as they imagine, under God's anathema, all who cannot pronounce their shibboleth. The truth will make us free, in proportion as we receive it, from the false traditions of dead theologies, mountains of speculation that have been accumulating for ages and shutting out from our view the Sun of righteousness. We shall have faith enough to remove those mountains. We shall call no man master upon earth. We shall regard no man, or set of men, as an infallible authority to which reason judging in the light of conscience must bow.

> "He is the freeman, whom the truth makes free,
> And all are slaves beside."

Absolute dependence upon God implies a glorious

independence of man, of human fashions, human criticisms, human denunciations, human threats. God grant that, in this and every noble and kingly sense, the truth may make *us* free!—us who, as joint-heirs with Christ and members of a royal priesthood, are no more subject to bondage!

VI.

THE FACTS OF CHRISTIANITY.

"That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed."—*St. Luke* i. 4.

THE Christian religion differs from all false religions in this, that it is based upon facts; and that the external evidence by which it is proved, is the evidence of the actual occurrence of those facts. We have not followed a cunningly-devised fable. We maintain, in the face of the world, that if the arguments by which the truth of Christianity is assailed be carried out, they will show that we can have no certainty of anything under the sun, and that universal doubt is a necessity of our present condition. That such reasoning proves too much, is obvious to common sense. There are many things concerning which we have no doubt,—concerning which we cannot entertain a doubt without doing violence to our whole nature, and denying principles that are axioms of our consciousness. Universal doubt never has been the condition of any one mind for a single hour since the beginning of the world. To talk of it as a necessity of the present condition of the human race, or to reason in a way that leads to such a conclusion, must therefore be not only unphilosophical, but utterly absurd.

Whether miracles were produced by a suspension of the known laws of nature, or by bringing into operation laws of nature which continue to be hidden from us, they certainly were matters of fact. All metaphysical speculation with regard to the possibility or impossibility of

miracles, is beside the mark. To assume beforehand that they are impossible, is to beg the whole question, and prove nothing. To say that a miraculous event is inconceivable, is to assert what no man in his senses can be excused for believing. Question your own mind. Take the case of Lazarus. Can you not conceive that Jesus Christ, the Lord of life, brought back the departed soul into a dead body, and that the individual became alive again, and associated with the living as before his decease? We cannot conceive *how* this was done, because the whole subject is at present beyond the circle of our knowledge. But that the fact occurred is easily conceived. You have no difficulty whatever in conceiving it; and you are astonished at the boldness of any one who tries to persuade you that your mind is incapable of conceiving it. Even a child, on hearing the narrative, forms a distinct conception of the event as a real occurrence. Clever men, by subtle processes of thought, often suggest imaginary difficulties, and retard, instead of furthering, the establishment of truth.

Let us now glance at some of the facts, on which our belief in Christianity is founded.

There were miracles connected with the birth of John the Baptist, the predicted forerunner of the Messiah. They were known throughout the whole hill-country of Judea. They happened in part to his father, when employed in his priestly functions in the temple at Jerusalem, and afterwards at the circumcision and naming of the child. They were followed by the public ministry of John, who openly censured his countrymen, and declared himself to be the forerunner of the Messiah. His disciples were distinguished from those of Jesus; and John did not even know that Jesus was the Messiah until the descent of the Holy Spirit at His baptism. John was afterwards imprisoned and put to death by Herod. These things were known to thousands, and tens of thousands in Palestine. It is only necessary for our present purpose to consider the Gospels as histories written by honest men, soon after the events narrated.

Jesus himself was born at Bethlehem in the reign of

Augustus. The Roman commissioners for the taxing were present at Bethlehem. The shepherds were witnesses to the appearance of angels, announcing our Saviour's birth with a song of joy and praise. The birth itself was a fact which, like every other birth at that period and in that country, must have been formally entered upon the public records.

That a star, or meteor of some kind, conducted wise men from the East to Bethlehem, was known to King Herod, the priests, and other leading men among the Jews. Could the Apostles have imposed this upon the nation as a fact, if it had not taken place, if there had been no star, no arrival of the wise men, no consultation as to the birthplace of the Messiah?

That Herod, alarmed at the birth of one called by the wise men "King of the Jews," murdered the infants of Bethlehem, in the hope of destroying his supposed rival; and that the fact was reported to Augustus is testified even by Macrobius, a heathen.

That Jesus had been in Egypt, and that he had returned from thence, was admitted by unbelieving Jews in the early days of Christianity; and unbelieving Jews endeavour to this day to explain His power of working miracles, by supposing that He was instructed by Egyptian priests. If the miracles had not really been wrought, there would have been no necessity for attempting to account for them. If Jesus had never been in Egypt, the invented explanation could have no meaning.

His interview at twelve years of age with the doctors of the law in the Temple must have been well known to a vast number of Jews, because it happened at one of the three festivals which brought up the greater part of the nation to Jerusalem.

His baptism at thirty years of age was a well-known fact. A "multitude came forth to be baptized" by John in the Jordan. "Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him; and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my be-

loved Son; in thee I am well pleased." It is not said that the baptism of Jesus took place in the presence of the multitude; but John at least witnessed the descent of the Holy Ghost upon Him, and publicly announced the fact.

A great part of the three years and a half of our Lord's ministry was passed in the presence of crowds of the Jewish people, who listened to His teaching, heard Him correct their traditions, and saw Him work miracles, healing the sick, cleansing the lepers, raising the dead. The Romans dwelling in Judea were aware of the facts; and the Jews who came up from various countries to the solemn feasts appointed by the law, carried the intelligence, on their return, to the ends of the earth. Verily "these things were not done in a corner."

Neither could the dwellers at Jerusalem be ignorant that Jesus, who claimed to be the Son of God,—the Messiah predicted by their own prophets,—was, notwithstanding all his illustrious miracles, crucified, by order of Pontius Pilate, at the instigation of the Jewish people and their rulers. This event, which took place at the Feast of the Passover, when Jerusalem was thronged, was known not only to the Jews as a nation, but also to a great number of heathens, in Palestine and throughout the Roman empire, and even beyond the limits of the Roman sway. The Jews, instead of denying it, regarded it as a proof that Jesus could not be the Messiah, because they expected Him to be a temporal prince. The heathen also taunted the disciples with the fact: but they, instead of being ashamed of their master's ignominious death, celebrated every week the memorial of it, in the Sacrament of the Supper, instituted by Himself.

During the crucifixion, there was darkness over all the land from the sixth to the ninth hour; *i. e.* from noon to three o'clock. "About the ninth hour" Jesus died. This darkness was no eclipse of the sun; for the crucifixion took place at the season of the Passover, when the moon was at the full. The darkness was wholly supernatural, an awful sign of the hiding of God's countenance from the land in which the Son of God was hanging upon

the cross. When the earlier Gospels were written, there were myriads of Jews still living, who could have contradicted the statement concerning the darkness, if it had not been true. "And the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom." The high priest, priests and levites, must have been aware of this miraculous occurrence, although they may not have perceived its deep significance. We read, however, that "a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith." "And the earth did quake, and the rocks rent, and the graves were opened: and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." The sun refused to shine, the solid globe trembled, the very rocks were cleft asunder, and the opening graves prepared to give up their dead, as soon as the sepulchre in Joseph's garden should yield up Christ, "the first-fruits of them that slept." Was this an ordinary earthquake, and its occurrence then a mere coincidence? Nay, verily it proclaimed the bursting of the gates of death, and that "the death which had happened had broken the bands of death for ever. The graves were opened at the moment of the death of the Lord: but, inasmuch as He is the first-fruits from the dead—the resurrection and the life—the bodies of the saints in them did not arise till He rose." The Roman centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, could not help exclaiming, when with terror they "saw the earthquake and those things that were done, Truly this was the Son of God." They were impressed, they were awe-struck, they were convinced by facts—facts unprecedented and undeniable—facts which continue irrefragable to this hour, in the face of hostile criticism and obstinate unbelief.

That Jesus Christ arose from the dead on the third day is as certain as that He was "crucified, dead, and buried." The weekly memorial of that event has never ceased to be observed throughout the eighteen centuries that have since elapsed. As it was impossible to found such an institution as the Passover, on anything but a

fact, so it was impossible to begin the celebration of such an institution as the Eucharist, unless the event which it celebrates had actually taken place. The disciples, at first incredulous, when convinced beyond the possibility of doubt, considered the resurrection as the confirmation of those truths which Christ had taught them. They maintained the reality of it before heathen tribunals, wherever they carried the gospel. Pains and penalties could not deter them from proclaiming what they *knew* to be true. The prospect of death itself, lingering and cruel, could not move them from the steadfastness of their testimony.

We now come to the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, a fact of which all Jerusalem was a witness, fifty days after the feast of the Passover, at which Jesus Christ was crucified. In the whole history of the world, it is only among the facts of Christianity itself that we find anything so wonderful. Twelve unlearned men, chiefly fishermen, maintain before the whole Jewish nation that the same Jesus whom their unrelenting persecution brought to the cross but fifty days before, rose from the dead, ate, and drank, and conversed with them afterwards, ascended into the heavens from a part of the Mount of Olives, near Bethany, before their eyes, and has now conferred upon them the power of speaking languages which they never learned, and of healing all manner of diseases. Jews of different nations, assembled at Jerusalem to observe the festivals, heard them speak in a great variety of tongues, admitted the fact, and attempted to explain it by the absurd supposition that they were drunken, as if drunkenness could enable unlearned men to speak foreign languages. (This is worthy to be ranked with the ridiculous story invented to account for the disappearance of Christ's body from the sepulchre. Bigotry will often invent fables, and practise frauds, rather than confess itself in error.) That the Apostles, as well as their ascended Lord, had the power of miraculously healing diseases, is established upon as indisputable testimony as the fact that Augustus was Emperor of Rome; and that, after their teaching

had been rejected by the Jews as a nation, they turned to the Gentiles, multitudes of whom accepted the Gospel, is a fact of which there are so many indisputable proofs in the world at this moment, that it cannot be called in question.[1]

These are some of the principal facts on which Christianity rests. To enumerate them all, even concisely, would exceed the limits of a single discourse.

Now, no man, or set of men, could have forged the New Testament, and then persuaded a host of people, who were living at the time, or soon after the time assigned to the events, to believe that they were facts, while they were in reality mere fictions. This, we may fairly say, is inconceivable. We challenge any one to form a distinct conception of any method by which this fraud could have been accomplished. To illustrate the impossibility of such a thing, we may refer to Christian baptism, as well as to the Lord's Supper. Has any theory ever been invented to account for the practice of these sacred ceremonies through successive ages, on the supposition that they have not been handed down to us from the very mouth and institution of Jesus Christ? Yet Jesus did not send His Apostles to baptize and teach all nations *until after He had risen from the dead*, and was about to ascend into Heaven; and a few days after He had given them the commission, He, from heaven, endowed them with the Holy Ghost and the power of working miracles, to enable them successfully to execute the commission during the remainder of their lives. Can anything be imagined which could prove more clearly that His doctrine was divine? Consider the alternative. If it was *not* divine, then we must believe that an impostor, a deceiver, hateful to the God of truth, did rise from the dead, either with God's help or by God's permission; and was able to endow a company of obscure and uneducated men with the gift of tongues, the power of healing diseases in a moment, the most heroic constancy in difficulties, dangers, and frightful sufferings; nay more, was able to crown their labours

[1] See a Summary in Bishop Watson's Tracts.

in various parts of the world with the most astonishing success, so that, ultimately, whole nations cast away their idols, and the greater part of the Roman world adopted the new religion. This is the alternative. We must believe that an impostor was able, under the government of the God of truth, to do all this, if Jesus was *not* the Son of God, as He professed to be, and if His doctrine did not proceed from God, as He declared that it did. In whatever way a person may try to avoid the conclusion, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent from heaven to reveal the Gospel to mankind; in whatever way he may attempt to account for the undeniable facts on any other hypothesis, he will find himself embarrassed by insuperable difficulties, and confounded by the absurdities into which he is compelled to plunge.

The Christian religion, then, is based upon historical facts,—actual occurrences, which involve great truths. These facts are demonstrable, on the supposition that the Books of Holy Scripture, we may say, even on the supposition that *any one of the Gospels, and the Book of the Acts*, are the writings of an honest man, or honest men. Much alarm has lately been excited by new theories of inspiration which have been broached; and that many things have been written rashly and ignorantly on that subject cannot be questioned by any Christian who is conversant with the current literature of the day. But there is a dangerous mistake underlying all this excitement and indignation. Far be it from me to defend or extenuate the errors of those who attempt to undermine the real foundations of the Christian faith, on which all our true happiness must be based: and that some living writers do attempt this, is too notorious to be denied. On the other hand, we must be careful *that we ourselves do not raise a false issue* in the argument, *or tacitly allow them to do so.* It is a mistake—a monstrous and most perilous mistake—to suppose that the Christian religion must stand or fall with any theological theory of inspiration. *The facts on which the Christian religion is founded are independent of all theories of inspiration.* We find in Holy Scripture a most precious and invaluable record of

the facts; but the facts would have been the same, if the record never had existed, although our knowledge of them would have been incomparably less clear and satisfactory than, in God's good providence, it is, unless some other help had been substituted, to make up for the want of a written record. We read that "Enoch walked with God," and Abraham was "called the friend of God;" yet these and other eminent saints entered into rest centuries before the Bible was begun. By personal communications God made up to them for the absence of a written record of revelation. And if it had pleased Him to continue this method, we might have been Christians now, though the Bible had not been written. It would, in that case, have been no less true that the events recorded in the sacred history took place, and that the predictions of inspired prophets were uttered, and that the teaching of inspired Apostles was such as we now, by their writings, know it to have been. The Apostles' Creed (as it is called) or some summary of the same kind, might have been the only written document of the Christian Church; and yet, by the grace of God, the Christian Church might have been even more widely extended, and more prosperous than it is now. This might have been, had it pleased the author of Christianity and Creator of the universe that it should be so. But would it have been the case if the facts had been preserved only by oral tradition, without any other divine aid, such as the continuance of a series of inspired prophets? We cannot suppose that it would. Had we been left to mere oral tradition, we cannot doubt that a thousand absurdities would have been engrafted upon the original faith, for every one that actually has been engrafted upon it. So that, if our whole life were a psalm of thanksgiving, we never can thank God sufficiently for the Bible. Next to the gift of His Son to save us, and of the Holy Spirit to sanctify, teach, and comfort us, the divine communications contained in the Bible ought to be valued by us, when we consider their bearing upon our relations to God, and upon our everlasting future. But, on the other hand, we raise a false

issue, and throw our creed open to assault where it is properly unassailable, if we allow it to be said that Christianity must stand or fall with some theory of inspiration invented by divines. I have no doubt that every theory hitherto put forward on that subject is a mixture of truth and error. But, however that may be, to stake the truth of our religion on the credit of ever-changing speculations of the schools, is high treason to our Heavenly King, the head of the Christian church. He has not said, or commissioned any of His servants to say to us, that every word of the Scriptures has been dictated by God, the human writer being a mere amanuensis writing to dictation; so that an error, even in the names of a long genealogy, is as impossible as a mistake in the arrangement of the fixed stars. This is the theory of what has been called plenary verbal inspiration; and it has the authority of a sort of tradition in large sections even of the Protestant church. But no man can believe it who is minutely acquainted with the Scriptures, and with the history of the Canon. It requires us to believe too much, and thus, like Popery, has a tendency to promote infidelity. Men who begin by believing too much, often end in believing next to nothing. If it had pleased God to do so, He might undoubtedly have dictated to His servants every word and clause of the Bible exactly as we find them. But He has *not* done so. The Scriptures *do not affirm* that He has done so. The facts of the case render it *impossible to maintain* that He has done so. That direct communications from God, such as prophecies, may have been thus dictated, word for word, we do not question; and that the teaching of Jesus was all expressed in divine, and, therefore infallible, words, we do not question. The prophecies and the words of Jesus on earth, and from Heaven, make up a large proportion of the Bible. But they are not the whole of it; and to extend the theory of dictation to all the remaining parts—to every chronicle and every catalogue of names—is to take broader ground than the Bible claims, broader ground than the facts warrant, broader ground than we shall be able to defend.

It would be easy to avoid such topics, but would it be honest to do so, at a time when they are discussed in almost every house? We are appointed to preach the truth, and, as far as we can, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. To wink at error is an indirect way of supporting falsehood and subverting the truth. I believe the truth on this subject to be that there is a human element in Holy Scripture. Moses and the prophets, the Evangelists and Apostles, had natural talents; God works by natural means where there are such, and we find that the styles of the writers are as various as the natural characters of the men. God certainly has not miraculously preserved the Sacred Text from the mistakes and interpolations of transcribers, for the various readings of the Bible are very numerous,—amounting even to hundreds of thousands. Nay more, the original writers of the books, though inspired men, *nowhere lay claim to infallibility.* That a man may be inspired and yet fall, when left to himself, into grave errors of doctrine and practice, is evident from the dispute, for example, which took place between the Apostles Paul and Peter. Admitting the books to be authentic and genuine, it is obvious that all the passages delivered by Moses and the prophets, as dictated by God, and the passages delivered by the Evangelists and Apostles, as the words of Christ or the mind of the Holy Spirit, with all parallel portions of Scripture, the whole including a large part of the Bible, ought to be received as Divine Revelation which has been communicated through human minds, and is to be consistently interpreted (as far as possible) by God-given reason, judging in the Divine light of conscience. We may think that it would have been convenient and desirable that God should have secured and endorsed the perfect accuracy of every word of the Scripture history, and have preserved the text from being subsequently corrupted in any degree by those who copied it; but His ways are not as our ways, nor His thoughts as our thoughts. *He has not done so.* It is true that the discrepancies, although numerous, are generally of minor importance, but the smallest of them excludes the possibility of Divine dicta-

tion. It is wicked—shall I not say blasphemous?—to affirm that the Bible is perfect and infallible as God is.

Let us not, then, identify, or suffer others unchallenged to identify, any theory of inspiration with the credibility of the Christian religion. The Christian religion would have been true, though the Bible had not been written. It is true, notwithstanding the numerous mistakes of transcribers. It is true, nothwithstanding any minor discrepancies or mistakes into which the original writers may have fallen. Of the highest kind of truth the Bible contains incomparably more than all other books put together. But the truth of Christianity does not depend upon a *book's* infallibility, and the attempt to make this appear to be the case is the work either of ill-informed friends or of real enemies.

The great *facts* of Christianity are attested by evidence which no ingenuity of malice can ever shake. On these facts our religion stands. On these facts it is based by God Himself, and the foundation which He has established, and that alone, must be eternally sure.

VII.

THE ALTERNATIVE.

"Jesus saith unto him (Thomas), I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me."—*St. John* xiv. 6,

EITHER Christianity contains a Divine revelation, or it does not. If it does not, then the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles are not a true history. Not a true history! That is stating the case feebly indeed. They must be a museum of the most impudent falsehoods,—falsehoods proceeding not from ignorance but from cunning, and yet falsehoods thrust without any intelligible motive in the teeth of a multitude of persons who had the best opportunity of knowing them to be falsehoods. Now this is a remarkable issue. The alternative is startling. It must be worth attending to, for the question is confessedly one of the first importance. A mistake here may involve terrible consequences. If Christianity is from God, it is not easy to overstate the danger of treating it as a collection of old wives' fables.

Observe how the matter stands. No one pretends, I believe, that Christianity was ever demonstrated to be false. Christ announced Himself as the light of the world,—the way and the truth and the life; the only way by which any man can come to God the Father. He claimed to be the Son of God. He claimed to be one with the Father. He claimed a right to be honoured as the Father is honoured, and therefore to be worshipped as God. If these claims were not just, they were blasphemous. Yet no one pretends, I believe, that these claims were ever proved to be false.

Now if all the clever men who have written or spoken against Christianity, from Celsus and Julian downward, have never been able to demonstrate its falsehood, or the impiety of the claims advanced by its Founder,—if those who are still opposed to Christianity admit, as they do, that no such demonstration has ever appeared, then the doubts of the most persistent doubter can amount to nothing more than is conveyed in the word *perhaps*, or *probably*. He cannot be sure that Christianity is not true. He may think that *perhaps*, or *probably*, it is not. Certain, he cannot be. His very attitude of doubt implies that there are arguments of some weight opposed to his favourite view. His very attitude of doubt implies that he may possibly be wrong.

The point, then, to which I now invite your attention is this:—If a person who has hitherto rejected Christianity must admit, to himself, that he *may* be wrong,—and that much it is quite impossible for him in his inmost heart to deny,—then I say that even this *may be* on the side of Christianity, this lingering doubt, which he cannot set at rest or put away, makes it his duty throughout his whole life to treat the subject seriously at least, if not reverently,—to seek earnestly and diligently further light—and to conform to the precepts of a religion which he cannot prove to be false, and which may turn out to be true. This is putting the argument on its very lowest level.

"What!" exclaims the doubter, "my duty to observe the precepts of Christianity, because I cannot prove the system to be false! That seems to be most unreasonable." No, I answer, it is not unreasonable; and a little further consideration will satisfy you that it is, on the contrary, in accordance with the truest view of your interest and your duty.

For, mark this. If there were no evidence for Christianity, no sane man could entertain a doubt concerning it. In that case, the pretended revelation, and the pretended origin of the Teacher whose name it bears, must be so obviously and transparently an imposture that no respectable person could be found to open his mouth in defence

of it. But the fact that some have doubts about Christianity implies that there is something of the nature of evidence in favour of it. And, without going one step further, standing here on the mere threshold of the argument, I maintain what no man of common sense can deny, —that the lowest degree of evidence in favour of Christianity, taken in connection with the infinite importance of being right in one's conclusion, makes it the extreme of folly to live in disregard of the *precepts* of Christianity, that is, to live as if our religion had been proved to be false.

But let me not be misunderstood. I am pointing out the absurdity of excusing the neglect of Christian practice on the score of doubts concerning evidence. Far be it from me to convey the idea that mere compliance with Christian observances, without believing in the Divine authority for them, is what Christ requires of his disciples; or that there is a deficiency of evidence; or that unbelief is excusable. On the contrary, the evidence is such that it renders unbelief, after honest and patient inquiry, something marvellous and incomprehensible, if not impossible. And the precepts of Christianity refer, it must be remembered, not to outward observances merely, but also to the habits of the mind and the intents of the heart. The state of mind and heart required by Christianity cannot, indeed, exist apart from real belief in it.

But I am taking the lowest possible ground, in order to show that, on the principles of reason and common sense, careless, negligent, self-indulgent scepticism ought to be ashamed of itself, and ought to tremble in the darkness it has made.

Some one may say, "Why preach to us about scepticism? We have never questioned the truth of Christianity." Not in words, perhaps; but what does your conduct say? Be honest, each one before the tribunal of his own conscience. Do you believe that Jesus Christ is God? Yes? Then Jesus Christ, who is God, the Maker of heaven and earth, and Judge of quick and dead, left His command with reference to a most solemn and touching rite, "Do this in remembrance of me."

And yet, of those whom I now address, how many obey this Divine command? Very few. I have repeatedly laid the matter before you. If you really believed in your heart that this is not a mere ecclesiastical ceremony, but the command of God, could you disobey it habitually? You say the Creeds, I suppose, in the Service; but what inference does your conduct allow me to draw? None other than this,—that you do not really believe your own words,—that they are to you a dead formula,—that you at least *doubt* the authority for the injunction. If you believed it, could you possibly disregard it? Very soon you will have to appear in the presence of Him who said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me,"—of Him whose dying command you statedly disobey. Civilians! merchants! your money will soon vanish from your grasp. Soldiers! your promotions, your distinctions, will ere long be of not the slightest consequence to yourselves or to the world by which you will be forgotten. All sublunary marks of position and advantage will be blotted out, like the marks of waves on the sea-sand. Brethren of all ranks and conditions!—whatever your plans, whatever your prospects, whatever your successes,—soon you will be in the eternal world, reaping as you have sowed, and superseded here by another generation that will think of you no more than you think of the generations already gone. It may not be pleasant to dwell upon this: but all this is certainly true, and you know it to be true.

I am justified, therefore, in speaking plainly. Your habitual neglect, year after year, of a Divine ordinance, through which blessings are promised, forces upon me the conclusion that you entertain doubts as to the authority. For, otherwise, how could you act as if obedience were unnecessary,—as if you might claim to be called Christians without caring whether you keep Christ's commandment or not?

I have shown that if there were no evidence at all, there could be no room for doubt. The possibility of doubt implies some degree of evidence. I have shown, in order to put the matter before you in its strongest light, that

the lowest degree of evidence on such a subject as this—a religion involving the immortality of the soul and eternal consequences—makes obedience binding upon you, as your duty to God, and your duty to yourselves.

But when we come to consider the real state of the argument for Christianity, to speak of low degrees of evidence can be allowable only to press home upon you, not merely the wrongness of your position, but the folly and perverseness of it. If the lowest degree of evidence makes obedience your duty in such a case, what is to be said when one looks at the accumulation of evidences on which Christianity stands, like a great pyramid, whose base rests, not on a mountain, but on ranges of mountains, while its top reaches to the heavens? The simplest and most moderate statement that can be truly made as to the present aspect of the evidences of Christianity makes doubt concerning the principal facts on which our religion is based nothing less than ridiculous. I say this advisedly, after much inquiry, much reading on both sides, and much reflection.

But, if Jesus really died, and rose from the dead, and ascended into Heaven,—died as "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,"—rose again for our justification,—and ascended into Heaven to intercede for us, and to prepare a place for us in His Father's House of many mansions,—the House of His Father and our Father,—is it too much to expect that those who regard these as facts will observe the Sacrament of the Supper as He commanded, in remembrance of Him, and as an appointed means of realizing our oneness with Him and His oneness with us? Such an act of faith is a great help. All are welcome who desire and endeavour and intend to forsake their sins and follow the Saviour. In the atonement there are mysteries which we cannot explain. So there are in the nature of the soul, and in the relations between the soul and God. So there are in the constitution of nature, in the midst of which we find ourselves. But we know that God exists, that the soul exists, that between God and the soul relations exist, and that there is an established constitution of nature. The

difficulties even of what we see with our eyes are beyond the reach of the human mind at present. Be it ours to watch and wait, and work and pray, and act up to the light we have, looking confidently for more. The day is coming when we shall know, even as also we are known. In the meantime let us remember that these are the recorded words of Christ, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me,"—that His character, His works, and the experience of His disciples in all ages, prove His truthfulness,—and that the highest forms of spiritual life manifested in the world since His advent have been acknowledged results of union with Him.

VIII.

KNOWING AND TEACHING IN PART.

"We know in part, and we prophesy in part."—1 *Cor.* xiii. 9.

So says the Bible. Theology often speaks in a very different tone. It pretends to know everything, not in part, but thoroughly. At least, it often dogmatizes in a way that implies this. Take any system of theology, and see how little hesitation there is in speaking most positively about matters which, perhaps, the angels in heaven do not understand.

Now, there is a great deal of honest doubt, and a great deal of honest inquiry, and a great deal of honest anxiety to know the real truth concerning God's will and man's destiny. But when inquiry is met with mere positiveness of statement, without anything like proof, the mind is not satisfied, and the doubts remain, though the doubter may be silent. Theology often affirms things which are not found in the Bible at all, and it still oftener gives great prominence to things which, in the Bible, are only alluded to incidentally. It also claims for the Bible a completeness which the Bible nowhere claims for itself; and this, again, is a stumbling-block to those who examine the record and reflect, because they find that much of what is communicated, instead of being clear and complete, is exceedingly dim and fragmentary. Yet, this is what any one must expect who reads St. Paul's words, "We know in part, and we prophesy in part." God did not intend the Bible to be a complete revelation. It nowhere claims to be a com-

plete revelation. With the Bible in our hands, we know only in part many things of great importance; and, therefore, we are able to teach only in part. Of many subjects we have rapid partial glimpses, and no more; and as soon as we begin to build schemes of inferences on the imperfect knowledge thus acquired, we stumble blindly into error, on the right-hand and on the left.

Yet, notwithstanding the wild assumptions, and rash inferences that may be charged against theology,—notwithstanding the ten thousand questions to which we find no answer in the Bible, all that is absolutely essential to our well-being in this world and hereafter, is plainly laid down for our guidance,—all this, and a great deal more. The Bible is not a cyclopædia, embracing the whole circle of human knowledge. It has been properly compared to a chart. It shows how we are to keep the right course towards the haven of rest,—how we are to make the voyage of life in safety, and finally reach the promised land. It gives general sailing directions, and leaves us to use our faculties with reference to numberless subjects which may interest us deeply, but which it is not practically necessary for us to know.

No good man who sees the real design of the Bible can fail to admire it, and value it, and study it in a reverent spirit. The truths which it communicates meet the demands of reason and conscience, and the wants of the human soul. But if you go to the Bible to learn science and philosophy,—if you go to Genesis to learn astronomy, geology, natural history, and physical geography,—or if you go to the Gospels to learn political economy,—or if you go to any part of the Scriptures to learn a philosophy of mind or of morals or of history, you will not find what you are looking for, because it is not there. You are mistaking the design and use of the Scriptures. They do not profess to instruct you in those matters. They were not intended for that purpose.

But even if you confine your inquiry to what the Bible does profess to teach, you will still find that the knowledge conveyed is incomplete, though sufficient. "We know in part and we teach in part," says the

Apostle. If we pretend to teach in full when we know only in part, we are presumptuous and dishonest. But if there is in us any of the modesty of true science and culture, we shall see that, as everything God has made is perfectly adapted to the purpose for which it was intended, so is the revelation which He has given us,—that if a complete revelation would have been more suited to our present circumstances and better adapted to the securing of our final happiness than the partial one which we have, a complete revelation would have been given,—but that, since it has not been given, we may safely infer that the time has not yet come for giving it. "When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." To all who love the truth "that which is perfect" shall come by-and-by. Yet the word "perfect" must here be understood comparatively; "When that which is *comparatively* perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away." Perfect knowledge, in the strict sense of the words, is Omniscience. That is the attribute of God alone. The knowledge of a finite creature must always be finite, though the horizon of knowledge go on expanding every hour. So in one sense it must for ever be true, even if we were to know as much as all the happy angels know, that "we know only in part." But the Apostle's meaning is plain enough. He was not writing a philosophical treatise in which words must be used with absolute precision. He meant that when the fragmentary knowledge, which we now have, is seen in its relations to other truths which are at present hidden,—when we see as a whole what we now see only as disjointed parts,—then our misapprehensions will be corrected, and our former ideas, being defective and more or less erroneous, will vanish away, giving place to grander conceptions and larger views.

In the meantime our business is to live up to the light we have, to use earnestly and diligently the knowledge which God has already been pleased to bestow,—above all, to follow the example and practise the precepts of Him Who is now our High Priest in heaven, pleading

for us and sympathizing with us in all our trials, doubts, and difficulties. Let us remember that "God is love," and that Christ is God; and that, without charity, we are mere sounding brass and tinkling cymbals when we use religious language. If we have this charity, which is love, in our hearts, we shall think and speak charitably of those with whose opinions we cannot agree. When we bear in mind that the best instructed of mortal men know only in part, and how very various are the points of view from which different persons regard the same subject, we ought to be moderate, and considerate, and gentle in expressing our disapproval of what we reject, especially in matters of a speculative kind. Such moderation, considerateness, and gentleness, are quite consistent with firmness and decision of character. We may be immovably firm in adhering to what we believe to be true, without showing ill-temper and employing offensive epithets. "Let every one be fully persuaded in his own mind." To his own Master each of us standeth or falleth. Who art thou that judgest another? We all know but in part, but if we seek the truth diligently, and practise what we know, then, by-and-by, that which is perfect shall come, and we shall see, no longer darkly, but face to face. The veil will be lifted and the glory will be manifested in the complete unity and harmony of all the parts and all their details. Surely the prospect of seeing this, and of being ourselves in harmony with God and all His works, is the most delightful that the heart of man can entertain or conceive.

IX.

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS.

"Thus saith the Lord of Hosts, yęt once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory."—*Haggai* ii. 6, 7.

After a captivity of seventy years in Babylon, the remnant of the Jewish people returned to their own land. Jerusalem and the temple were in ashes, having been burnt by the Chaldean army under Nebuchadnezzar. But this haughty conqueror and his three successors on the throne of Babylon had passed away; and the crown was worn by Cyrus, the undisputed sovereign of all western Asia. God put it into the heart of this mighty prince to allow the people to return to Judea, and rebuild their temple. Accordingly, forty-two thousand persons, availing themselves of the royal clemency, went back to their desolate country, to rebuild the waste places of Zion. Their leader was Zerubbabel, the lineal representative of the house of David When the patriots were leaving Babylon, king Cyrus showed them kindness, and gave them the sacred vessels and utensils which had been carried away from the temple of Solomon. With these precious gifts, they set out upon their journey, and, in the second year after their arrival in Jerusalem, they laid with solemn ceremonial the foundations of the second temple.

More than half a century had elapsed since the destruction of the former temple; yet there were among

tlfe people some, who in their youth had worshipped there. These comparing the beginning that had now been made with what they remembered to have seen on the same site, could not refrain from tears. Ezra tells us that "many of the priests and levites, and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice." They saw that, with their diminished resources, this new building could never equal the temple of Solomon in splendour; and they vented their grief in loud lamentations.

"Now, when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity builded the temple unto the Lord God of Israel, then they came to Zerubbabel, and to the chief of the fathers, and said unto them, Let us build with you: for we seek your God, as ye do; and we do sacrifice unto him, since the days of Esar-haddon, king of Assur, which brought us up hither. But Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and the rest of the chief of the fathers of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us, to build an house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto the Lord God of Israel, as king Cyrus, the king of Persia, hath commanded us. Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, and hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus, king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius."

These untoward circumstances combined to discourage the people; and the progress of the work was interrupted for more than fourteen years. At the end of this period, king Darius made a decree that the work should no longer be hindered by the enemies of the Jews, but that the building should proceed, and that a part of the tribute which came from beyond Jordan into the royal treasury, should be paid to the pious builders, to enable them to complete their undertaking.

The despondency of the Jews, however, was so great, that they needed still further encouragement. The comparative inferiority of this new temple distressed them.

Accordingly, the prophet Haggai was sent with three messages from God, and the words of our text form a part of the second.

"In the seventh month, in the one-and-twentieth day of the month" (that is, a few weeks after they had resumed the work), "came the word of the Lord by the prophet Haggai, saying, Speak now to Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and to the residue of the people, saying, Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing? Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, saith the Lord; and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech, the high priest; and be strong, all ye people of the land, saith the Lord, and work: for I am with you, saith the Lord of hosts. According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so my Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not. For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land;—and I will shake all nations, and *the desire of all nations* shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts. *The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former*, saith the Lord of hosts; and in this place will I give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

Here indeed was encouragement for the children of the captivity, to go on with their great undertaking. Their governor, Zerubbabel, had not the wealth or the resources of Solomon; and the worldly circumstances of the people were widely different now from what they had been during the reign of that mighty prince. Yet the God of Israel assured them, by the mouth of His holy prophet, that "the glory of the latter house should be greater than (that) of the former." Yes,—the Messiah, "the desire of all nations," was one day to tread its courts; and thus the house was to be filled with glory. The outward form of the church was to be changed; and the divine Saviour, who was to introduce the new dis-

pensation, would honour "this latter house" with His personal presence, which would render it even more glorious than the Shekinah had rendered the former temple. Observe—

I. That the person alluded to in the prophecy, as "the desire of all nations" is Christ, the Saviour of the world.

That the Jews expected and desired the advent of the Messiah, none will question. But how can it be said that His coming was desired by the Gentiles, who generally were ignorant of the prophecies, and utterly unacquainted with the principles of the true religion? Whatever the causes may have been, it is an admitted fact, that, about the time when our Lord was born in Bethlehem of Judea, there was throughout the world a general expectation of the coming of a mighty prince, who should rule the nations, and be a great deliverer and friend of mankind. Even four centuries before the coming of Christ, Socrates, the illustrious heathen philosopher, and some of his disciples, expressed the opinion, that mankind needed a heavenly teacher, to direct them in the cultivation of virtue, and the worship of God. The poet Virgil, in one of his Eclogues, written a few years before the birth of our Lord, expresses the essence of some of the Old Testament prophecies. The wise men of the East, who followed the star to the lowly couch of the infant Jesus, evidently came from a part of the world where the advent of the Messiah was expected.

We cannot doubt that the three sons of Noah and their families were acquainted with the prophecy, *that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head.* Noah must have received this by oral tradition, and communicated it to his children, with a suitable interpretation. The posterity of Shem, Ham, and Japheth carried the teachings of the pious patriarch to different parts of the globe; and the prophecy concerning the Messiah was probably handed down from generation to generation, even long after the knowledge of the true God had ceased to exist among the people. This is one solution of the difficulty.

There is another. The children of Israel were for a long period bondsmen in Egypt; and thus the Egyptians

must have become acquainted with their traditions. But Egypt was for ages renowned throughout the world, on account of the skill of her artists, and the learning of her priests; and the scholars of other countries did not usually consider their education complete until they had listened to the sages on the banks of the Nile. There were few European philosophers of any note, who did not travel into Egypt; and thus the Greeks and Romans, and through them, the inhabitants of the whole civilized world obtained whatever fragments of prophetic truth the Egyptians had borrowed from the children of Israel.

We are still further to bear in mind (and perhaps this is the most satisfactory explanation of all) that, when our Lord appeared in the likeness of sinful flesh, there were members of the twelve tribes of Israel dispersed among all nations. "The dispersion ordained by Heaven for judgment on the crimes of idolatrous kings, had, in that wonder-working power by which good is brought out of evil, planted the law of Moses in the remotest extremities of the world. Among its proselytes were the mighty of all regions,—the military leaders,—the sages,—the kings. All, at least once in their lives, came to visit Jerusalem and the temple; and they came with the pomp and attendance of their rank. Three millions of people have been counted at the Passover; and every race of mankind, in its most marked peculiarities, there passed beneath the eye." [1]

Now, since there were children of Israel scattered among all nations,—and since there were proselytes to the Jewish faith among all nations,—and since these persons must have desired the fulfilment of the prophecies which were their constant study,—it is clear that the Messiah was literally the desire of individuals in all nations, or, in general terms, according to the usage of prophetic language, "the desire of all nations."

There is also another sense in which Christ may be said to have been "the desire of all nations," not only of the Jews, but of the Gentiles. All reflecting persons among the Gentile nations felt, like Socrates, that they

[1] Croly's 'Salathiel.'

were in the dark concerning some of the most important subjects that could occupy the thoughts of man. On these subjects, therefore, they desired light, and consequently the advent of any divine teacher who could introduce this light. The only teacher who possessed such power was the Messiah, "the light of the world." He was, accordingly, in this sense also, "the desire of all nations." Observe—

II. How the latter house was filled "with glory." It was filled with glory when honoured by the personal presence of the divine Messiah,—"the desire of all nations,"—"God manifest in the flesh."

In infancy He was brought to the temple by his mother, that the money might be paid, and the sacrifices offered, which were required by the law. It was then that the aged Simeon, and Anna, the prophetess, recognized Him as the Messiah, and praised the Lord for His advent.

In His early youth He came up to the Passover, and by His understanding and answers astonished the doctors, and all who heard Him, within the courts of His Father's house.

In His manhood, after commencing His prophetic ministry, "He taught daily in the temple."

Thus the prophecy was accomplished,—"I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of Hosts." The second person of the adorable Trinity—God the Son—appeared in human form in the temple which the children of the captivity were building, when Haggai delivered the prophecy. This temple was afterwards repaired, beautified, and enlarged by Herod the Great; but the building was essentially the same.

But not only was the presence of the Messiah to fill the house with glory; it was to fill it with glory in a higher sense than that in which the Shekinah had filled the temple built by Solomon. This point is worthy of careful attention. "The glory of this latter house shall be *greater than of the former*, saith the Lord of Hosts." This prophecy and its fulfilment demand the special notice of the Jew and the Unitarian.

The Shekinah, or luminous cloud which rested between the golden cherubim and over the ark, was the sensible symbol of the presence of God in the first temple. When this temple was destroyed by the Chaldeans, there was no place for the Shekinah to rest in, and it no longer appeared. Now, if Jesus Christ was not God, how could it be said that His presence would render the second temple more glorious than the Shekinah had rendered the first? *We* have no difficulty in believing the prophecy, because we know that the personal appearance of Christ in "the latter house" was a fuller manifestation of the Deity than the Shekinah, which rested in "the former" house. But how is a Jew to explain it? He admits that this is an inspired prophecy; but, if it was not fulfilled by the appearance of Jesus Christ, it was never fulfilled at all. The fulfilment certainly cannot be future, for nearly eighteen centuries have passed away since "the latter house" was utterly destroyed. As our Lord predicted, there was not left one stone upon another, that was not thrown down. How, then, was the glory of the latter house greater than that of the former? Was it more costly and magnificent in its decorations? No. Notwithstanding the vast expense that was lavished upon it by Herod the Great, although it was, at the commencement of the Christian era, one of the most magnificent structures in the world, it was inferior to the temple of Solomon. "Whoever compares the sixth chapter of the first Book of Kings, even with the most splendid accounts of the second temple (however adorned with costly stones, and other magnificent decorations), must perceive that the former, being overlaid in every part with pure gold, possessed a glory, of this kind, which was incomparably beyond that of the second temple in its highest magnificence; yet the prophecy only means that the glory of the second temple should exceed the glory which the first had at any time been favoured with." The presence there of the incarnate Son of God fulfilled this prediction.

This one prophecy, therefore, furnishes an argument

against the infidelity of the Jew, which he cannot meet. According to his own showing, the prophecy is *canonical*, by which he means that it is the inspired word of God; and yet, if the Messiah has not come, it has never been fulfilled, and it *never can* be. The Jew cannot possibly vindicate the truth of his prophecy, except by admitting that Jesus Christ was the promised Messiah, and that His divine presence filled "the latter house" with greater glory than that with which the Shekinah filled the former.

For, let us suppose for a moment that the second temple surpassed the first in magnificence, what can the Jew gain on this ground? Will he maintain that any quantity of gold and precious stones could make up for the absence of the symbol of the divine presence,—of the ark and the mercy seat,—of the urim and thummim in the breast-plate of the High Priest,—and of the sacred fire on the altar, which had been first kindled from heaven? Will he assert that any superiority in outward splendour could not only counterbalance, but *more* than counterbalance the want of all these? On his own principles, this would be blasphemy. This would be to assert that the Divine Presence in the Shekinah conferred less glory upon the first temple, than gold and precious stones conferred upon the second.

And if this prophecy exposes the folly of the Jew, in what light does it present the heresy of the Unitarian?

If Jesus Christ was not "very God," how could His presence make the second temple more glorious than the Shekinah made the first? If Jesus Christ was a finite creature, as the Unitarian holds, how could the presence of the creature be more glorious than that of the Creator?—how could the presence of the creature confer more honour on "the latter house," than the presence of the eternal Creator conferred upon "the former"?

The truth is, "the desire of all nations" did come; His divine presence filled "the latter house" with glory; and "the glory of this latter house was greater than of the former," because in it *the Deity was more fully manifested*, and because in it *our Lord proclaimed the Gospel*,

of which the legal ceremonies were but shadows and types. In Solomon's temple, God, speaking from the cloud that hung over the mercy seat, communicated His will only to the High Priest, at long intervals; in the second temple, God appeared in the form of man, preaching the Gospel to the poor, daily. Is it possible to conceive a more complete fulfilment of any prophecy?

In one part of the Holy City the Gospel is now preached, but on the summit of Mount Moriah, where the first and second temples stood, the God of the Christian is no longer worshipped "in spirit and in truth," either by Jew or Gentile. Among the sacred towers of Salem desolation has reigned for ages.

But, although the visible temples have long since been destroyed, there is a yet nobler temple in which God the Lord has promised to dwell for ever; that temple is His Church. Every hour it is growing, under the eye of the divine Architect. Are we living stones of this temple? If so, we "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom we also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

And not only is the Christian Church collectively represented in Scripture as the temple of God; the same is said of each faithful disciple individually. "Know ye not," said the Apostle to the Christians of Corinth, "that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." "What! know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" "Ye are the Temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

The inquiry suggested by these passages is obvious. Are we individually temples of the Holy Ghost? Does

the Spirit of God dwell in the heart of each of us, purifying and making us fit for Heaven? Is "the Desire of all nations" our desire? Can we say with David, "Lord, whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee"? Does Christ, dwelling in each heart by His Spirit, "fill the house with glory"?

X.

SUCCESS GUARANTEED—HOW?

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts."—*Zechariah* iv. 6.

MIGHT is might, and power is power, only because God wills it and so far as He wills it. The names which we give to the forces that bind and regulate the starry systems would be mere empty words if God were not continually acting through the forces. What we call the laws of nature would be as powerless and dead as fossils if God did not continually keep up their energy. A stone would not fall to the ground, the sap would not rise in a tree, the blood would not circulate in an animal, if divine power were not continually put forth for these purposes.

In the operation of physical laws we see a uniformity which we do not see in the events of history. The human will and the power of evil are allowed, for a time and to a certain extent, to resist the will of God. Yet this very resistance, being a part of the divine scheme as a whole, is subject to certain laws,—in other words, is controlled by the divine will; and the results are, doubtless, far more uniform than to us they seem to be. We can see little more than the surface. The secondary causes which bring about historical events are complex, and often lie very deep below the surface, but not one of them was unforeseen by God. The very least of them was taken into account; they were all provided for in the divine plan; and they are all controlled in such

a manner that the final result will be, must be, very good.

There is great comfort in all this to them that trust in God. Man's might and man's power, Satan's might and Satan's power, may seem to be almost insuperable obstacles to the progress of what is right and true. But the obstacles were foreseen and provided for, and will in due time be overcome. God's will must be carried out fully in the final issue. His purpose cannot fail. His methods may take us by surprise, as they often do; but they must succeed. His ways and thoughts are not as ours. His way of training us is in many respects different from what we should have expected; but it would be absurd and atheistical to suppose for a moment that His way is not the best.

Christ is the centre, not only of Christianity, but of all truth. He claims to be this: He says, "I am the truth." Any scheme of the universe constructed without reference to Christ as the central truth, from which all other truths radiate, must come to nought. The fallacy of that scheme will be exposed some day; it cannot hold together long; it contains elements which must work its own destruction. Yet there are at this hour systems of philosophy, partly physical, partly metaphysical, and partly theological, in which Christ has no place. They will fly to pieces by-and-by; the centrifugal force will scatter them; it is impossible for them to bear the test of time and inquiry. In our own day, one after another has exploded. The history of speculation during the last hundred years, especially in Germany, is one of the most curious that could be written. The rapidity with which theory has followed theory, each attracting public attention for its brief day of apparent triumph, and then falling into neglect or oblivion, is most remarkable. Ponderous engines have been pushed forward for the assault, but one after another has been withdrawn into the darkness.

Christianity, notwithstanding its uncompromising antagonism to all forms of evil, to every sinful or excessive indulgence, continues powerfully to influence the civilized

world after the lapse of eighteen centuries. Why? Because Christ lives, developing His purposes, fulfilling His promises, and establishing His kingdom. There is no other way of accounting for this standing miracle,—the continuance of the Christian faith as a living power in the hearts of men; not in the hearts of the ignorant and superstitious only, but in the hearts of persons of the highest culture and the largest attainments. Looked at merely from the human side, what is it that we see? An obscure and uneducated Jew of Palestine claimed to be the Son of God, and the Teacher of the human race, and the Saviour of the world, and the Fountain of eternal life. It is certain that "man never spake like this man," this uneducated Nazarene. His words have never ceased to influence the world since they were first uttered,—to influence the world more widely than any others that were ever spoken. Yet He himself was crucified at Jerusalem as a malefactor. This cruel death He met, with amazing calmness and resignation, at the age of thirty-three. His public teaching had extended over about three years only; but from that teaching are derived the deepest, the grandest, the most essential principles of our modern civilization. What fell from His holy lips met a divine echo in the human soul. His words had a living power which leavened first the character of individuals,—most of them obscure and unlearned,—and, through those individuals, much of the society around them; and from age to age this leaven has continued to spread, as Jesus predicted. It is the most powerful principle in the world at this moment. Even those who would like to ignore it are unconsciously influenced by it. Against their will, it modifies the plans of the most irreligious politicians. It is continually showing itself where it was least expected. Men cannot shut it out from their thoughts or from their schemes. Individuals, corporations, communities, governments are compelled, often most reluctantly, to recognize it. All the learned cleverness, all the winged satire, all the pungent wit of a host of unbelievers and scoffers have utterly failed to expunge Christianity even from the

fashionable literature of the day. An infidel writes a romance, it may be, for the express purpose of making the Christian faith appear to be a superstition; but, in spite of the author, his book indirectly preaches Christianity to his readers. The very effort to keep it out is a proof of its power; just as the effort needed to keep out the sea from a low country, like the Netherlands, is unmistakable proof of the power of that element. In short, go where you will, throughout the civilized world, —observe society and individuals, the principles which they recognize as unquestionable, their manners, customs, politics, art, literature, philosophy,—make your survey as wide as you please and as minute as you can, and you will find that the words of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our God, are working like levers under the very foundations of society, and as a supernatural leaven in the midst of it.

The works of permanent value which have been produced within the last three hundred years by members of the Church of England, in defence of Christianity, are so numerous that they would form a considerable library. I say the works of permanent value,—works which, as to their main arguments, have never been refuted. It might be expected that all men able to read English, who have access to these works, would be prevented by such unanswerable arguments from lapsing into scepticism. But if you converse with sceptics on the subject of Christianity, you will find in the great majority of cases that they know little or nothing of what has been written in defence of it. Their knowledge is generally confined to a stock of old cavils and objections which have been repeatedly answered, though they are ignorant of the fact. If the clear statement of solid evidences could make men Christians, there ought not to be an educated infidel in the world. But here we find that the might and power of just reasoning are not sufficient even to attract general attention, after the first novelty is over, much less to convert men to Christian faith and practice. Those who really desire to know the truth, and who are willing to embrace it at whatever cost, ought to spare no pains in

seeking it. But how few sceptics show any such diligence! Now those who are not diligent are not in earnest. It is not by reading from time to time a sparkling article in an infidel Review that one is to find out what is true concerning Christianity. But human nature has been the same in all ages. The heart is corrupt. It loves darkness rather than light, and it will not come to the light, and nothing but the power of God can produce a radical change in this respect. We need not fancy that sound arguments are going to change the practice of the generality even of those who listen to them. No! When that change takes place, it is always the work of a higher Power.

Yet, while we look for God's blessing, and rely on it only for success, we must be diligent in using the means.

In the Divine dealings with the human race, there has often been a remarkable contrast to the methods which man's wisdom commonly suggests. God chooses the weak to confound the mighty, in order that no flesh may glory in His presence,—in order that His own Divine hand may be seen,—in order that it may clearly appear how little man's knowledge or skill counts in the presence of God, how easy it is to carry out the Divine purposes with what we should consider the most inadequate means, and how exclusively redemption and salvation are God's own work.

While rejoicing over the success of any good work, we are to give God the glory. To Him it belongs. Nevertheless we must avail ourselves of our opportunities and advantages, whatever they may be, as watchfully and as earnestly as if the result depended upon our exertions. The careful training in Egyptian learning which Moses had received in his youth, disciplined his mind, and prepared him for the exercise of his natural talents in the administration of the affairs of the Hebrew people. David, when he went against Goliath, took advantage of the skill which, as a shepherd boy, he had acquired in the use of the sling. The Apostles who accompanied their Lord during his ministry made good use of whatever advantages they had received; and Paul, who was comparatively a learned man (though the Corinthians said that his bodily

presence was weak and his speech contemptible) turned his learning to the best account in the service of his Master, as may be seen by the narrative in the Book of the Acts, and also by his own Epistles. These and all other true servants of God glorified Him, and avowedly ascribed to Him the glory, in the exercise of whatever gifts He had bestowed and of whatever acquirements they possessed. "Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might," is a noble motto; and happy is he who, while he acts upon it, remembers and believes the text, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." The blessing can come from God only, but He promises to help only those who do what they can to help themselves. This is true as applied to the Church corporately, or to each soul individually.

The children of the captivity, under Zerubbabel, had begun to rebuild the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and the angel that talked with the prophet Zechariah answered and spake unto him, saying, "This is the word of the Lord unto Zerubbabel, Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. Who art thou, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (*i.e.* he shall be enabled to surmount this great difficulty,—to accomplish this vast undertaking), "and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it. The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto you. For who hath despised the day of small things."

Zerubbabel was to work, and the people were to work with him, earnestly and continually, day after day, and they had here the assurance from God that their labour should not be in vain. Yet it was by God's blessing upon their labour that they were to succeed. It was not to their own might that they were to ascribe the result, but to the Spirit of God animating their hearts, sustaining their spirits, and strengthening their hands.

Jerusalem and the temple are symbols of the Church of God throughout the world, and the rebuilding of Jeru-

salem and the temple bears a close analogy to the establishment and edification of the Christian Church. Those who built the walls of Jerusalem were obliged to work with their swords girded at their sides; so, in the establishment and extension of Christianity, it has ever been necessary for the builders to be in readiness to resist the enemies of our faith, and to prevent them from destroying the work. Yet we are to remember God's message to the children of the captivity, when they rebuilt the holy city:—"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." It is not the wisdom of the wisest, or the arguments of the most acute, or the earnestness of the most zealous, or the eloquence of the most gifted advocates that can make the cause of Christ prosper in the world. It is the unseen operation of the Spirit of the living God upon the hearts of the people. This, and nothing without this, will secure the result. This, and nothing but this, can turn the hearts of the nations like rivers of water. Sometimes there is a great upheaval,—an ecclesiastical earthquake,—that shakes everything to its foundations, and tests the stability of every structure. Such an upheaval took place at the first establishment of Christianity, and afterwards at the Reformation, and the consequence was that the hearts of the people were turned,—the rivers changed their courses, and at this day we are enjoying some blessed effects of those convulsions that shook society. But such methods are exceptional. The divine operations are generally slow, silent, gradual, and almost imperceptible,—like the slow action of rain upon the hills. Grain by grain the sand is carried away,—lump by lump the soil loosens and falls. Now and then there is a great landslip, and huge rocks descending plough up beds for new watercourses. But by far the greater part of the work of levelling the hills is brought about silently, imperceptibly, and very slowly. And as God, by His prophet, said to Zerubbabel, "Who art thou, great mountain? thou shalt become a plain," so he virtually says to those who are labouring to establish true religion, to build up the Christian faith in the world. The great mountain,—the huge accumu-

lation of obstacles,—shall become a plain. But we must labour and watch and wait; we must be diligent and cautious and patient. The work is very great, and its progress will generally be very slow; and it is not by any noisy and violent methods,—not even by the might or the power of human skill, or human arguments, or human appeals,—but by the unseen, unheard, gradual working of the Spirit of the living God. We are to use our best skill and bring forth our strongest arguments and utter our most earnest appeals, but we must look to the Spirit of God for their efficacy, and we must remember always that by far the greater part of the work is done in the quietest possible way. The kingdom of God cometh not with observation,—with pomp and show and outward tumult. God always uses the means which are really best adapted to the purposes in view, although to man they may not appear to be so,—although to man they often appear inadequate, unsuitable, and inferior. Therefore, when we look to the past and see how this always has been, we need not wonder so much at the slow progress of Christianity in the world, and we need not wonder that the men most distinguished in the eyes of the world are not always champions of the Christian faith. A great proportion of the truest work for God is done by persons who never attract public observation.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

XI.

PURPOSE OF CHRIST'S ADVENT.

"Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."—1 *Corinthians* iv. 5.

CHRISTIAN brethren who differ in opinion, even on subjects of very great importance, are not to condemn one another hastily; and are not to ascribe to each other unworthy motives. The Lord will come, though His coming be delayed. He knows the heart of every man. It will be impossible to deceive Him. He knows what allowance ought to be made in each particular case of error or infirmity, because the whole case is before Him. We do not know what allowances ought to be made. The whole case is not before us; and, besides, we are very apt to take one-sided and partial views. We are prone to become special pleaders, rather than judges. The judicial tone of mind, indeed, is not natural to any man. It is the result of culture and habitual self-restraint. In discussing questions concerning what is revealed, we ought to bear this in mind, and to be constantly on our guard. And the more important the question, the more cautious we ought to be. And if the person, whose statements of opinion we have particularly in view, has already passed to his account, this is an additional reason for delicacy and moderation in our style. The Lord who permits (for the best reasons undoubtedly, though we may not be able to fathom them) errors to creep into the Church, and good men to spend much

effort, century after century, in promoting them, will Himself appear by-and-by; and then we shall not only see more distinctly the real bearing of disputed points; but we shall also discover the true character of our opponents, whom, it may be, we have judged uncharitably.

Against such uncharitable judgments, the text is designed to guard us; and the argument is one which ought never to be long absent from our thoughts. The Lord is coming! He is still to us, as He was to all the ancient Church, "the coming one" (*ὁ ἐρχόμενος*). Let us judge ourselves, therefore, brethren, that we be not judged of the Lord. Where we know that we have been guilty, let us reflect and amend: and if we have erred on the score of censoriousness or bitterness, let us amend that.

At the same time, we must stand up for what we believe to be true, whether the truth under consideration has been controverted by the dead or by the living. Without another word of preface, let us go straight into the subject which is to occupy our thoughts at this time, —the purpose of our Saviour's advent in the flesh. One might suppose beforehand, that whatever differences there might be among Christians, on this point at least—as the central truth of their belief—they must be agreed. The fact is far otherwise. We desire to conceal nothing as to the differences. We may wish that the fact were not what it is. But we remember that there are no accidents or oversights in the divine government. These differences of opinion, however wide, will be overruled for good. Even the worst heresies will be made to contribute, in the long-run, to the honour and glory of God. And the exposure of them will be a means to that end.

Let us, therefore, devote our attention now to the consideration of one of the most deplorable heresies that ever darkened Christendom,—not for the sake of denouncing any persons or parties, but for the sake of pointing out the glorious truth which has been trampled upon, crushed (as far as that was possible), and with great zeal and vigilance kept out of sight.

The heresy is this, that the purpose of Christ's advent was, *not* "that the world through him might be saved,"

but only that a part of the world might be saved; that God will *not* have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, but only a fixed number of chosen ones, to whom the effectual grace of the Holy Spirit is given. This effectual grace is withheld from the rest of mankind; yet they are held responsible for not possessing the character which only this effectual grace could produce; and they perish everlastingly.

That is the doctrine stated broadly. I was myself brought up in the belief of it. Many good men teach it at this moment, though they avoid, as far as they can, putting it into a form which flatly contradicts the Scriptures. Of course they hold that it does not really contradict the Scriptures, though it may appear to do so. I will give you a specimen of the kind of interpretation which is resorted to, by quoting from the late Dr. George Hill, Principal of St. Mary's College, St. Andrew's, a learned and pious man, whose 'Lectures in Divinity' have long been established as a text-book.

He says, "Christianity offers a remedy which is not confined to any one nation, but may be embraced by men of every country" (p. 382). "Although the accomplishment of the prediction, that Christianity is to be preached to all nations, has been delayed, there cannot fairly be drawn by reasoning or analogy any presumption that the prediction will never be accomplished. We are thus warranted to apply to the Christian religion that character which it assumes to itself as the religion of mankind: we discern one sense in which it may with propriety be said, that 'God will have all men to be saved,' and that Christ is the propitiation 'for the sins of the whole world.'"

According to this, the myriads of millions of human souls who have died unconverted since the Creation, or who are yet to die unconverted before the millennium, are left out of the account. God did not intend that they should be saved, and therefore Christ was not a propitiation for their sins: but the fact that Christianity is not confined to any particular nation, and the prospect which we have of a future period when all *then living* upon the

earth will embrace Christianity, sufficiently confirms the statement of Scripture that God "will have all men to be saved," and that Christ is a propitiation "for the sins of the whole world." On this I make no comment. But I will quote a remark of Dr. Hill's made a few lines further on. He says, "As the Church of Scotland has adopted a particular system of opinions concerning the extent of the remedy, it is decent and fit that those who desire to be her ministers should be well acquainted with the grounds of that system. But it is not necessary that these grounds, or that the system itself, should be explained to the people. We fulfil the office which is committed to the ministers of the Gospel, when we call our hearers to repent and believe in order that they may be saved."

I cannot concur in such an opinion. I hold that we ought to keep back nothing from the people of what we believe to be true. If we see difficulties in certain passages of Scripture, we ought to confess this: and we ought not to try to give the people the impression that we have cleared away the difficulties, when we know in our hearts that we have not done so. I do not believe that any doctrine which proceeds from God ought to be concealed, or that the true interests of human souls can be promoted by any such concealment. If there are weak points in a bridge, it ought not to be thrown open to the public: but, then, it ought either to be mended or pulled down. It is not a safe bridge. The best possible bridge for the clergy ought also to be the best possible bridge for the people. If it is sound and sufficient in all its parts, there can be no need of concealment.

I make no imputations against the author now referred to. He was a man of rare impartiality, of large views, and of a truly catholic spirit,—a man too great, it may be said, for the position which he occupied. One cannot but be struck by the fairness with which he states the views of his opponents. Sometimes he puts them in so favourable a light that you cannot help thinking he must himself have been favourably impressed by them. In proof of his impartiality, let me now give you what I believe to be the true doctrine in his words:—

"The doctrine of universal redemption is held by all the Lutheran churches; and it is avowed by the great body of English divines as the doctrine of Scripture and of their church." "According to this doctrine, the death of Christ is a universal remedy for that condition in which the posterity of Adam are involved by sin,—a remedy equally intended for the benefit of all." "This doctrine appears to represent the Father of all in a light most suitable to that character, as regarding His children with an equal eye, providing, without respect of persons, a remedy for their disease, and extending His compassion as far as their misery reaches. And it appears to represent the satisfaction which Christ offered to divine Justice, as opening a way for the love of God to the whole human race, being made manifest by the most enlarged exercise of mercy. These views are supported by the general strain of Scripture, and by many very significant expressions which occur in the New Testament. It is said that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of the world; that He died for all; that He gave himself a ransom for all; that He tasted death for every man. The extent of the grace of God in our justification seems to be compared with the extent of the effects of Adam's sin in our condemnation." "All to whom the Gospel is revealed are commanded to believe in Christ for the remission of sins, which seems to imply that He has made atonement for their sins; and to give thanks for Christ, which seems to imply that He is a universal Saviour. Jesus marvelled at the unbelief of those among whom He lived; He upbraided them because they repented not; He besought men to come to Him; and He bewailed the folly of the Jews, saying, as He wept over their city, 'If thou hadst known in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace!' The Almighty, both in the Old and in the New Testament, condescends to use entreaties and expostulations, as well as commands: —'What could have been done more to my vineyard that I have not done in it?' 'Oh, that my people had hearkened unto me!' 'God hath given unto us,' says the Apostle, 'the ministry of reconciliation, to wit, that God

was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.' The establishment of a gospel ministry continues this ambassadorship in every Christian country, and may be regarded as a standing witness of the universality of redemption; because these expostulations, which the servants of Christ are commissioned to use in the name of God, appear to be without meaning, unless we suppose that God hath done everything on His part, and that it rests only with us to embrace the remedy which is offered." "If there is any manner by which the ends of primitive justice can be attained in a consistency with the salvation of the human race, it appears to us, judging *à priori*, that it is becoming the Almighty to adopt this manner, because, in so doing, He acts both as the Lawgiver of the universe and as the Father of mankind." "In the substitution of Jesus Christ, according to the catholic opinion, there is a translation of the guilt of the sinners to Him; by which is not meant, that He who is innocent became a sinner, but that what He suffered was upon account of sin." "By declaring that the iniquities of the whole world were laid upon this person, He transferred to Him the guilt of mankind, and thus showed them, at the very time when their sins are forgiven, that no transgression of His law can escape with impunity."

On reading so clear and conclusive a statement, the question naturally arises, how did the writer excuse himself from believing it? He has put the case of his opponents so strongly that one does not see how he can help agreeing with them. I will now give you what seems to be the pith of his defence in his own words, "If faith in Christ be the condition upon which men become partakers of the propitiation which He offered to God, it seems to follow, that all who have not the means of attaining this faith are excluded from the benefit of this propitiation. But it is certain that the ancient heathen world did not know the nature of that dispensation, the promise of which was confined to the Jews;

and it is manifest that a great part of the world, at this day, have never heard of the Gospel." "If the efficacy of the remedy is inseparably connected with its being accepted, it cannot be, in the intention of the Almighty, a universal remedy, since He has withheld the means of accepting it from many of those for whom it is said to have been provided. The words of the Apostle, then, 'God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth,' must receive *from the event* an interpretation different from that which is the most obvious; and all the other texts urged in favour of universal redemption are, in like manner, limited by the imperfect publication of the Gospel." Again, "it appears that the event, in those countries where the Gospel has been published, clearly indicates that there was not in the Almighty an intention of saving all men by the death of Christ, for it is plain that many of those who have every opportunity of believing in Christ, either reject His religion, or show, by their conduct, that they do not possess that faith which entitles them to partake of the benefits of His death." "We must admit that the original intention of the Creator and Ruler of the universe always coincides with the event," therefore, "we do not seem to draw an unwarrantable conclusion, when we infer from the event, that it was not a part of the intention of the Almighty to deliver them [all mankind] from wrath by the death of His Son."

You perceive that here the event, that is, the final and unalterable doom of the whole heathen world, past, present, and future, and of all others who have died without true faith in Christ, is taken for granted, as a doctrine so plain from Scripture that there can be no question about it; and then the numerous texts, which speak of redemption as universal, are limited to a narrow interpretation, because it is supposed that they must be consistent with this assumption.

We deny the assumption. We call for proof that the event is what it is here taken for granted to be. In the Bible we find no proof of any such doctrine. (There are mistranslations in our authorized version, which may

mislead the English reader; but mistranslations are no part of the Bible. They have been pointed out by scholars; and any one who is willing to take a little trouble can easily ascertain what renderings are objectionable, and on what grounds.) The assumption, then, of the event being nothing but an assumption, we maintain that all attempts to make plain passages of Scripture square with that baseless assumption, are necessarily delusive; and that a theology, which is built on such perverted texts, cannot be pure Christianity, but must be, on the contrary, a misrepresentation of it. The texts which declare the universality of Christ's redemption, are among the simplest and most unmistakable in Holy Writ. To pretend that they mean something totally different from what they say, and to do this avowedly for the sake of protecting a foregone conclusion concerning the hopeless perdition of the whole heathen world, and other countless multitudes; this is a mode of procedure which (to speak mildly) cannot fail to excite our wonder. We must just remember the power of early training, national traditions, and ecclesiastical partisanship, and be as charitable as we can.

The fundamental mistake on which some of the most prevalent systems of theology have been based, lies in the notion, that the benefits to mankind of the atonement of Christ are limited to those persons who know them and embrace them during their short life in the fleshly body. We find it confidently asserted by pious and learned men, that no salvation is possible which has not thus been secured by each individual before the close of his earthly career. Some, who are considered liberal, make an exception in favour of infants, idiots, and certain rare characters among the heathen. But this is a mere private opinion. Now, if the Scriptures affirm that no salvation is possible for those who have not known the Gospel, and embraced it, during their life in the body, then the Scriptures contain no Gospel for mankind, and there can be no intelligible sense in which Christ is what the Apostle affirms Him to be,—"the Saviour of all men." But we desire to have those places

pointed out. Some of us have been searching the Scriptures for a long series of years, without finding any such assertions. I deny that they contain any such assertions. Men who go through the Bible, looking for texts to confirm a preconceived theory, may quote verses here and there which appear to answer. But this is not the way to discover what the Scriptures really teach.

"It makes all the difference, whether you inquire, first—On what grounds does such-and-such an opinion rest? and afterwards, What consequences are likely to flow from it? or whether you reverse the order. The unbelieving Jews did the latter: 'If we let him thus alone, the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.'"[1]

Strict Calvinists hold that "the work of redemption and the work of salvation are the same thing;"[2] but they limit both to the Elect. Theologians of the Church of England, and of nearly all other Churches, believe that the whole race is redeemed; but most of them limit salvation to a part of the redeemed. A few—and among them some of the greatest and best of men—have maintained it to be the teaching of Holy Scripture, truly interpreted, that all mankind are redeemed, and that, at the close of the Mediatorial Economy, all mankind will be saved.

Many think that such good news as these last proclaim, is too good to be true; and many, that such a Gospel, even if true, is too undiscriminating to be safe. Such doubts and apprehensions, however, are of little moment in presence of the question, *What is the Gospel which Revelation declares?*

Can it be pretended that this question has been settled? Is the same Gospel taught in all Christian Churches? or in all Protestant Churches? or even by the clergy of the Anglican communion? Were the good bishops who met in "Pan-Anglican Synod," themselves of one mind as to the full meaning of the Gospel?

Is it not assumed in nearly all "Bodies of Divinity," that, although God sent His Son into the world, He

[1] Whately. [2] Jonathan Edwards.

could not have intended that the world through Him should be saved?

Is it not generally assumed, in such digests of Revelation, that Christ cannot be, in any strictly true sense, "the Saviour of all men," and that He is the Saviour *only* "of them that believe" here on earth, and, therefore, only of *some of those who are instructed* in Christ's religion *here?*

Is it not generally assumed in such works, and in the numberless religious books and tracts based on their theories, that "where sin abounded, grace did abound," *not* "much more,"[1] but much *less*; since, for want of saving grace, which alone is effectual to melt hardness, a vast proportion of "the whole world" (for whose sins Christ was a propitiation[2]) is destined to suffer endless torments?

The historian Gieseler says of Manichæus,—"His system of religion rests on the assumption of two everlasting kingdoms coexisting and bordering on each other, *the kingdom of light* and *the kingdom of darkness*, the former under the dominion of God, the latter under the demon." In the third century the Manicheans were considered heretics; in the nineteenth century, those who *deny* their central doctrine, under whatever modifications, are often denounced as heretics,[3] and in terms which appear to indicate that the rack, the gibbet, and the stake might still be used as arguments if certain controversialists had the power.

Yet, if the Manichean assumptions are true, what becomes of the Gospel which was preached unto Abraham,—that in his seed (which is Christ) *all the families of the earth* were to be blessed?[4] What becomes of the Gospel preached by St. Paul,—that "all Israel shall be saved,"[5]—that the Gentiles are "fellow-heirs and of the same body,"[6]—that "the head of every man is Christ,"[7]—and that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under

[1] Rom. v. 20. [2] 1 John ii. 2.
[3] *E. g.* Dean Stanley and Professor Maurice. [4] Gen. xii. 3.; xxviii. 14.
[5] Rom. xi. 26. [6] Eph. iii. 6. [7] 1 Cor. xi. 3.

the earth; and that every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, *to the glory of God the Father*"?[1] And what becomes of the glorious Gospel preached by "the Saviour of the world" Himself: "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved";[2] "The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world":[3] "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me";[4] "It is written in the prophets, and they shall be all taught of God"?[5]

[Taken as a whole, the doctrinal formularies of the Church of England are no doubt as pure as those of any Church in Christendom. But the interpretations of these formularies by successive generations of clergy, have been as various as their interpretations of Scripture. Do we find in the writings of the most eminent divines of our Church, from the Reformation downwards, any one system of doctrine? Compare the works of Hooker, Laud, Ussher, Hall, Taylor, Barrow, Reynolds, Hopkins, Stillingfleet, Beveridge, Patrick, Samuel Clarke, Waterland, Warburton, Hoadly, William Law, John Heylin, Butler, Wilson, Secker, Bishop Newton, Paley, John Newton, Horsley, Watson, Magee, Marsh, Arnold, Copleston, Julius Hare, Donaldson, Frederick Robertson, Whately, and Hampden,—nearly all archbishops or bishops. How widely different are the schemes which they have set forth as true expositions of the Divine scheme revealed in the Bible![6]]

The Church of England teaches me to "believe in God the Son, Who hath redeemed me and all mankind." All human beings are born into the world as redeemed creatures, but with a corrupted nature tending to evil. The consequences of this tendency to evil have been, are, and, while the tendency lasts, must continue to be, dreadful.

Millions of children are born into the world every year. In the purpose of God all generations yet unborn have been redeemed, as well as all generations preceding:

[1] Phil. ii. 10, 11. [2] St. John iii. 17. [3] St. John vi. 51.
[4] St. John xii. 32. [5] St. John vi. 45. [6] Not preached.

"redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot, who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world" (1 Peter i. 19, 20),—"the lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. xiii. 8),—"the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (St. John i. 29.)

But, though from the beginning it was God's purpose that the Lamb should be slain, and should thus take away the sin of the world, the actual death on Calvary did not take place for ages after the foundation of the world, and, historically, a great part of the sin of the world, which Christ "came to put away by the sacrifice of Himself," has not yet been committed.

Sin is opposition to God. "God is love:" love is godliness: godliness is holiness: and all that is contrary to this is sin. Our Lord declares love to God and man to be the sum and substance of the law of holiness.

"The sin of the world" which Christ "came to put away," and which He *is* continually taking away, includes the whole guilt of every man, woman, and child, from Adam to the last who shall be born of woman,—not omitting even those who despised, rejected, persecuted, crucified our Lord Himself, and the most inexcusable unbelievers in all ages. If there were so much as one exception, how could it be true that Christ is "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," — "who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,"—that is, testified by the result?

For what is redemption? Is it not deliverance from bondage by the payment of a price? From what bondage hath Christ redeemed mankind? Is it not from bondage to the devil and the works of the devil, including all corruption and sin? "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil," and "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who, through fear of death, were all their lifetime subject to bondage." (Heb. ii. 14, 15.) And with what price has Christ redeemed us? "Ye are not your own: ye are bought with a price,"—"the precious blood of Christ." (1 Peter i. 19.)

The price has been paid, and all human beings are born into the world as the redeemed of Christ, inasmuch as they have been bought by Him. They are not their own. They are not the devil's. They belong to Christ, who loved them and gave Himself for them. What is Christian baptism but the divinely-appointed mode of declaring this, and ratifying to the individual, according to his capacity to receive them, the inestimable benefits purchased for the race?

And it has been true of all the posterity of Adam that each came into the world a redeemed child. For, though the price was not actually paid till "the precious blood" was shed, yet, in the purpose of God, the Lamb was "slain from the foundation of the world;" and the sacrifice availed for those who died before the death of Christ as much as for those who have died since, and those who are living now, and those who are hereafter to come into the world.

See, then, upon what a mighty work our Lord entered when He undertook the redemption of the world, the taking away of the sin of the world, the putting away of sin by the sacrifice of Himself, the destruction of the works of the devil, and the destruction, too, of the malignant author of these works, in so far, at least, as he is a devil.

The vast design seems to us to be carried on with wonderful delays. But "the Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity." "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts." God is not limited as to time. Hath He announced a date before which the redemption of the world must be completed? Hath He declared that it will be completed in this dispensation? or in the next? or in the one following? Nay! His kingdom shall come; His will shall be done in earth as it is in heaven; in Christ all the families of the earth shall be blessed. But "it is not for us [at present, any more than it was for the Apostles] to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power." (Acts i. 7.)

The subject before us is of overwhelming importance. Our ideas of God and of the Christian religion depend upon it. The endless destiny of innumerable multitudes depends upon what is really true concerning it. *What was the purpose of Christ's advent?* This is the question. Whatever His purpose was, it cannot fail in the end. "For this purpose," we repeat, "the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." This undertaking has been little more than begun. The works of the devil abound everywhere throughout the world. But Christ is God, and He is carrying out His purposes in His own way, and just as He intended. The Bible speaks of æons, dispensations, ages, cycles stretching out into the endless future. We live in one of them; we shall live through them all. Here we are in the fleshly body; by-and-by we shall be in bodies of a different kind. They who choose evil here shall suffer for that choice hereafter. Therefore we urge you, by every consideration of interest as well as duty, as you value your peace in this world and your salvation from unspeakable misery in the next, to repent and obey the Gospel. We cannot know for what cycles of duration sin may go on reproducing itself, and misery may go on growing in intensity, in the souls and bodies of those who now reject an offered Gospel. But we abide by the words of Revelation. Christ is the Head of every man. Christ tasted death for every man. On Him was laid the iniquity of us all. God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. The purpose of God must stand, be man's perverseness and consequent misery what it may. The power of the devil is doomed, however long it may be permitted to oppose itself. His destruction, as far as he is a devil, is distinctly predicted. Christ took upon Him our flesh and blood, "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil." And "the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" itself. Then God shall be "all in all." Nothing shall be permitted to exist that is opposed to God. Then the purpose for which Christ

was manifested shall be fulfilled, for then He will have destroyed the works of the devil, and the universe will be holy. If this is not prominently set forth in Holy Writ, how can we ever determine the meaning of its plainest language? Christ Himself says, "All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth;" and we read that, at "the right hand of God, angels, and authorities, and powers are made subject unto Him." "But," says the Apostle, "we see not *yet* all things put under him;" by which it is perfectly evident that the meaning is, *willingly* subject unto Him. For, in every other sense, they are and have been under Him, that is, under His omnipotent control. But "we see not yet all things put under him" as willing subjects. Yet St. Paul says that this is to be. He speaks of that effectual "working whereby he [Christ] is able even to subdue all things unto himself." "And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself (as Mediator) be subject unto him that put all things under him (viz. the Father), that God may be all in all." "And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things [sin and suffering] are passed away."

Blessed be God for this glorious prospect! Blessed be God for this good news from heaven,—this real Gospel! Not the gospel according to Calvin, but the Gospel according to Christ and Paul, and Peter and John. If your mind were filled with these truths as they represent them, your heart would overflow, your tongue could not be silent; you would enter into the feelings of the Apostle when he says, "If any man is merry, let him sing psalms." "Rejoice in the Lord alway! and again I say rejoice!" Te Deums and Glorias would burst from your lips spontaneously, as the natural outpouring of a heart filled with love and gratitude and joy and all the elements of everlasting praise. "Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord!"

XII.

OUR STRONGHOLD.

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe. The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit."—*Prov.* xviii. 10, 11.

SEE what a contrast is here. One man's refuge is in God; another man's refuge is his wealth. The refuge in God is real, and he who findeth it "is safe." The security a man supposes to be in wealth is not real. It is no security at all, but only "in his own conceit."

Now multitudes think that the very opposite of this is true; that the security which a man finds in wealth is real; and that the idea of taking refuge in the name of the Lord is a mere fancy, a poetical fiction, or a fanatical delusion. Wonderful, then, it must be that this delusion has been so widespread among the most excellent persons who have appeared in the world from the beginning. This has been their joy and their song at all times, even in the dark, dark days of trouble and trial,—"The eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. The Lord is my Rock, and my Fortress, and my Deliverer. The Lord is the strength of my life: of whom shall I be afraid?"

But what security can there be in wealth? How often it vanishes while a man is boasting of it, and rejoicing in it, and looking forward to many good days in which he shall see no evil! And then when he goes down to the grave, as he must do very soon, his wealth cannot follow him; he is on a level with the pauper. Only the

responsibility of his wealth follows him. His property in it is left behind, with all the pomp and show of earthly things.

When the millionaire, who has trusted in his riches as his strong city and his high wall, passes into the company of the departed, how he must condemn his own folly! How he will curse himself as a fool for having disregarded his own interest! He will cry, "I was not prepared for this. The outward good things of time always seemed to me to be the only solid realities. I used to mock at religious men as dreamers. I now see my mistake. I was the dreamer. I am deserted by God; for I neither loved nor served Him. Yet His eye is upon me, and the consciousness of this tortures me. Existence in such a condition is torment. Whither shall I flee? What can I do? To what or to whom can I go for help?"

This is but a faint representation of the reality. These words express but feebly what is felt by the ungodly man who trusted in his riches, when he opens his eyes in the region of the dead. The belief in retribution is inseparable from the human mind. God speaking through the conscience proclaims it. Attend thoughtfully for a single hour to the working of your own mind, and you will hear this testimony. All experience, all history, bears witness to what I say. I ask the man who denies Revelation to answer this question,—If there is no retribution, how is the human mind so constituted that, in all countries and in all ages, it has been unable to think without admitting the principle as certain? But I will not waste words in proving what none can deny. Then where do we stand? In view of certain retribution, what are our prospects? What is our present condition? What is our "strong tower"? Where are we accustomed to take refuge? In the name of the Lord? or in our wealth or prospects of wealth? Few men are able to amass wealth, but it is just the same if a person sets his heart upon it as the main object of life and as that in which he would take refuge if he could. The amount of one's wealth makes no difference in rela-

tion to this. A man who has saved a hundred pounds may set his heart upon that hundred as really and as ruinously as if he had a hundred thousand or a hundred millions; and a man who has saved nothing may be making an idol of wealth as really and as ruinously as if he were rich. Then let each of us ask himself,—Where do I desire to take refuge? In God or in worldly possessions?

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower" is just another way of saying "God is our refuge and our strength." "Our help is in the name of the Lord" means, our help is in the Lord. But "the name of the Lord" refers us to God manifested. "They that know thy name will put their trust in thee" means, They that know Thy character as Thou hast been pleased to reveal it. And the chief revelation of God to man is "the Word made flesh," Jesus Christ, God our Saviour. But before the Word was made flesh and dwelt among men visibly, the Word was often manifested in a measure under the old dispensations; and pious patriarchs and Israelites trusted in God manifested as truly as earnest Christians do. He was God their Saviour as He is God our Saviour. Yet the revelation of God is clearer incomparably to us than it was to them. God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is the strong tower to which we are to flee for safety. But the Deity has been visibly manifested in the Son; and his power is manifested to us now by the purifying, comforting, strengthening influences of His Spirit in our hearts.

Now this must be the personal experience of every true Christian; and, if we will, it may be the experience of every one of us; for this is all a most practical matter. We all know how much our enjoyment of a single day depends upon the state of our mind. At one time it is dark and cloudy weather in your soul; at another time the sky is clear. Now if you are filled with great anxiety or great distress about anything, and you find that, by taking refuge in God and laying your case before Him, your anxiety and distress are immediately relieved,—a great burden of care or grief has been taken

away in a moment,—and you rest consciously safe and secure, because underneath are the everlasting arms,—here is a practical benefit so great that no words can indicate its value. You feel that no strains of inspired psalmody are too high to express your gratitude. You have been elevated above the common things of life and its passing trials in such a way that you are perfectly satisfied that this help hath come from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Then if a person tries to persuade you that your trust is a delusion, or an illusion, or a fancy, or a phase of the natural mechanism of your own mind, your answer is, "The blessedness which I now enjoy is of a kind which I cannot doubt. I have sought it elsewhere, but never found it. I may not be able to solve all your difficulties or your cavils against Christianity; but my own experience proves to me, better than volumes of reasoning, however cogent, that the blessedness of fleeing to God as a refuge is real,—as real as my consciousness, as real as my existence; and you might as well try to convince me that the sun is not shining, when I see its light and feel its warmth, as that God is not fulfilling His promises to me, when I am actually enjoying their fulfilment."

Ah! be not deceived. If you desire to be happy, this is the way; Christ is the way; God our Saviour is the way. If you desire to have a strong tower to flee to, when you are beset and pursued by anxieties and troubles and trials, from without and from within, God is our refuge,—the only refuge in which you can be really safe, the only refuge in which you can be really blessed. What I am now saying has had the testimony of believers in all generations. It is nothing new: this truth is as old as the experience of the human race. The promises of God have never failed in a single instance since the world began. The Gospel of Christ is at this moment, as it has ever been, "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Oh, that I could convince you of this glorious truth! This is teaching of which we never can be ashamed, because it must be eternally true. To you and me its evidence will soon

be as indisputable as the existence of God. But woe shall be to them who make light of the Gospel of Christ, who trust in some Babel-towers of their own building, rather than in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. May God keep any of us from imagining that wealth can ever be really a strong city and a high wall to an immortal! May His Holy Spirit show us that our only sure refuge is in God, and that in Him alone we can be safe!

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XIII.

THE CROOKED SERPENT.

"By his Spirit hath he garnished the heavens; his hand hath formed the crooked serpent. Lo, these are parts of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him!"—*Job* xxvi. 13.

THIS teaches us that God created the material universe; and it teaches, what in some respects is even more wonderful, that God created the author of all evil. The same truths are differently expressed in other parts of Holy Writ: "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth:" "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." Some of the deepest problems ever presented to the human mind arise out of these statements,—problems which baffle us, for this reason, among others, because we are made acquainted with only "parts of his ways," because, even with the Bible in our hands, we hear but "a little portion" of designs which appear to be infinite.

From this we shall learn, if we are wise, one great lesson,—humility. If we compare the extent of our knowledge with the extent of our ignorance, the greatest philosophers and *savants* will be ready to confess with Newton, that they are like children gathering a few pebbles on the shore, while the great ocean remains unexplored and unknown.

But, though with all our boasted knowledge we are in reality very ignorant, and unable to pursue our inquiries far in any direction, yet is it good for us to make efforts

to rise to the height of this great argument,—not by being "wise above that which is written," but by endeavouring to perceive the scope of that which is written,—in order that we may have some idea of the limitations under which, for the present, our Creator hath placed us. And in this we are greatly helped by physical analogies, which illustrate on the grandest scale, and yet in matters most minute, moral relations and spiritual truths.

Every planet that goes wheeling round the sun has its cone of shadow. And on the surface of each planet, even in the sunshine, every object that has one side turned from the sun, is so far in shadow. What causes the shadow, but self intercepting and shutting out the sunlight? And what are all forms of evil, but self intercepting and shutting out the divine light of the Sun of righteousness, and giving its own shape to the evil? Yet shadows answer God's purpose, else there would be none. If the rays of light, instead of proceeding always in straight lines, could bend and follow a curve, and turn at an angle; if it had pleased God to make this the optical law, then there would be no shadows—no darkness—no night on the surface of the worlds. But even now, as the case stands, the worlds as a whole are in one true sense never out of the sunshine, though one side of them is always in the shadow. On reflection, you will find no paradox in this. The sun is always shining, though for part of the time we do not see it. The sunshine is always around the world on every side,—around shadow and all; and the reason why we do not see it is, that we are low down in the shadow and clinging to the world. Out and beyond the shadow, beyond all shadows great and small, the sun is shining gloriously, every hour and every moment; and to those looking from a high standpoint—to an angel, let us say—the shadows of all the worlds that circle round the sun, seem small indeed in proportion to the immeasurable areas filled with the sunshine.

Now mark the analogy. The moral world has its cone of deep shadow—its dark side—its evil. But outside

and beyond all shadows, all darkness, all evil, is God—omnipresent love—omnipresent light, irradiating all, surrounding all, and communicating Himself to all, notwithstanding that in the interior of the scheme,—in the midst of this infinite expanse of love and light, self, selfishness, *i. e.* sin, more or less obstructs the communication, and so far bars out blessedness. Our text says, "his hand hath formed the crooked serpent;" and another text says, "I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and create evil." But this view of God,—omnipresent love, omnipresent light,—exposing all evil, yet at the same time limiting it, circumventing it; this view, I say, gives or ought to give humble confidence in the paternal government of "the God of the spirits of all flesh," whose offspring we are: for there is not an atom, not an interest, not a destiny, which has not its appointed place in a scheme framed by infinite wisdom, and irradiated, as a whole, by infinite love.

Now, it is quite conceivable that the whole solar system might in some new constitution of nature, be without one shadow within the vast sweep of its remotest planet. All the worlds, and all the bodies on their surfaces, though now mostly opaque and obstructive of light, might by the fiat of the Almighty be rendered, each and all, transparent as a drop of dew, and therefore shadowless. Such a transformation is actually going on, to certain extent, in the moral or spiritual world. What is the sanctification of a Christian but such a transfiguration of self, that it becomes more and more permeated by the divine light proceeding from Christ, the Sun of Righteousness, till not a speck of darkness remains in it? Thus it becomes perfect in holiness, and wholly freed from the shadow of evil. And what a view is opened up to us when we read, in the Old Testament and the New, the predicted results of Christ's atonement! We are invited to gaze into a glorious future where the spiritual universe shall be transfigured and transformed; where there shall be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness alone shall dwell; where the works of the devil, which Christ came to destroy, shall cease to be;

where nothing shall survive the fiery ordeal of God's terrible judgments but what is pure and luminous and glorious and Godlike.

God's terrible judgments! Salvation means holiness. Sin persisted in is perdition. Where the grace of God is permanently resisted, the wrath of God must be endured. This implies not only more than mortal tongue can express, but immeasurably more than human imagination can conceive. The wrath of God! Very little reflection may satisfy you that this is the most awful subject of which we can think. We read even of the "wrath of the Lamb." Perhaps there is not a more remarkable expression in the Bible. "The Lamb" is a title implying gentleness and affection. When the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world, who loved us and gave Himself for us,—when He is angry, when His wrath is denounced against any,—surely there must be a fearful cause, surely there shall be terrible issues. We read that the obstinately impenitent shall be made to drink of the wine of the wrath of God, and that the vials of His wrath shall be poured out upon them. Our Lord Himself tells us that when the wheat is garnered, the tares shall be cast into the fire. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend and them which do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth." This is "the wrath of the Lamb." The fire into which they shall be cast is the fire of hell, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched." These words are set down in Holy Writ, as the words of our Lord Himself. I attempt no comment. They are beyond all commentary, because beyond our powers of conception. I may however quote the language of one of our best living expositors. Speaking of "the times of the restitution of all things," he says, "That as all mankind are one in Adam, so are they, in a far higher degree, one in Christ; still, that as there were originally distinct traces of sinful severances from the true unity of the race, so it is now. That there is, indeed, a present reconciliation, even

as there shall be hereafter a universal restitution; but that as the reconciliation was not only by Christ but in Christ, so, even more distinctly, is it said that the restitution shall be in Him, and only in Him. Consequently, that all which from the nature of things and the truceless opposition between light and darkness, between sin and holiness, cannot without blasphemy be conceived as in Him and in union with Him, will in the end be only as the dross and scum that is purged off by the refining and sublimating fire."[1]

And, to return to Scripture, St. Paul in his Epistle to the Thessalonians has these terrible sentences:—"The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord." These are terrible words. There is an awful future before the wicked. Where or when or how that future is to terminate the Scripture does not reveal in such a way that we can form any clear idea of the meaning. In any case, who can doubt that it must be "a fearful thing to fall," as enemies, "into the hands of the living God"?

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God and by the threatenings of God, and by the whole counsel of God, so far as revealed to us, to think of these things,—to weigh them,—to inquire into them. There is at all times but a step between you and death. Then you pass into an unexplored and unknown eternity. Oh! to have God for our friend! to have Christ for our Saviour! to have the Holy Ghost for our comforter, in that hour which is near us all! "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." Let us pray, earnestly, importunately, continually, that we may have grace thus to trust in our God and Saviour,—that we may be able to say in our last hour, "When I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil; for thou art with me."

[1] Bishop Ellicott.

XIV.

SIN.

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."—1 *John* i. 8.

Sin is the transgression of God's law. The law is holy, —the law is perfect; it makes no compromise; it demands perfect obedience, from the beginning of our career, on, on for ever. The slightest deviation from this perfect law—the smallest neglect of what we know to be right —involves guilt, and guilt implies punishment, unless the guilt can be atoned for and taken away.

But, though all this is true and undeniable, we are by nature so corrupt and so familiar with sin, and so accustomed to allow ourselves to go as far as we dare in the path which we know to be wrong, that our minds are darkened, and we do not see sin as a pure intelligence sees it. We do not see sin to be what it is. We are not deeply impressed with a consciousness of guilt. We make many excuses for ourselves. We try to lay the blame on God; we say in our hearts, "Why hast Thou made me thus,—beset with infirmities, affections, and passions, that lead me into sin?" When we are told that God created man in His own image originally, we complain that the consequences of our first parents' transgression have descended to us. We think that if each of us for himself had been placed in the same position, with the choice of obeying or disobeying the Divine command, some at least might have chosen obedience. Thus we go into curious questions of responsibility and abstract justice

(far beyond our depth), and take refuge in Doubting Castle. Then, when doubts are entertained as to the responsibility of those who come into the world with tendencies to evil, and doubts as to the guilt of transgression on their part, sin becomes a light matter in men's estimation, and they go on in it, without scruple, as far as they think they can do so without injuring their worldly prospects. Many, indeed, go much further. The love of sin leads them beyond the bounds of even worldly prudence. A certain recklessness takes possession of them; and unless, by the grace of God, they be plucked as brands from the burning, they hasten down to perdition.

I am not now going to discuss abstract questions of responsibility. One of God's attributes is justice, and nothing in His past or future dealings with mankind can possibly be unjust. If anything at present seems to be so, it must be because we do not know the whole case. But, apart from all speculations, the consciousness of sin and of guilt is so strong in the human mind, in moments of calm reflection, that no suggestions of Satan can remove it. Every day we have the choice before us between right and wrong, and we are conscious of liberty to prefer the one or the other. Yet who among us has always chosen what he knew to be right? Who among us has generally done so? Alas! who can answer the question without reproaching and condemning himself?

It is necessary to dwell upon this. Without a deep feeling of guilt we cannot value the Gospel. Any one who thinks lightly of sin cannot have a true idea of what God's law demands, and any one who thinks lightly of his own personal guilt must be very deficient in self-knowledge. We are all verily guilty,—fearfully guilty,—in the sight of omniscient God. We cannot give even a plausible excuse for one in a thousand of our transgressions. Yet only the Holy Spirit of God can fully convince the soul of what sin is, and of what its guilt is. This the Holy Spirit will do for any and every one who prays in earnest, and endeavours to realize the truth, by comparing himself seriously with the Divine law and with the example of

Christ. Supreme love to God and brotherly love to our neighbour ought to characterize our conduct every day and hour of our lives,—ought to mould every thought even. But how far is the best man or woman upon earth from such a standard as this, which, however, is the only true standard! Suppose that you were called now into God's presence, to give an account of every thought and word and action of your past life; do you imagine that you could defend yourself? Even before the close questioning of a man,—a frail fellow-creature,—would you not quail? If you were compelled to answer truly, would you not be covered with shame and confusion? Then what must your state of mind be if you were summoned before the all-seeing God, who knows every particular of your history far better than you do yourself? What you have long since forgotten is all clear to Him, as if it had happened a minute ago. Suppose, then, that you were summoned now to leave this world and be judged in the court of conscience, and God were to say to you, "I arraign you before me this day for all the sins which you have knowingly, deliberately, and intentionally committed, whether in act, in word, or in thought. I leave out of the reckoning whatever you can declare to have happened inadvertently, or unavoidably, or through inherited infirmity. I charge now against you only those personal transgressions which you had it in your power to avoid, but which, nevertheless, you did commit knowingly, deliberately, and intentionally. Answer for yourself. You know that you cannot deceive me." How does the thought of appearing at God's tribunal, to give such an account, strike you?

Remember that this is no rhetorical figure merely. Soon the summons will be a reality. Soon we must give an account unto God, who knows our whole past perfectly.

But hear the "good tidings of great joy." I am not here to tell you that, since you are steeped in guilt, you must live without hope and die in despair. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The Divine Messiah made atonement on the cross for the guilt of the human race, from the first sin of the first to

the last sin of the last. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." As soon as you trust in Him with your whole heart, you discover that the benefits of that atonement are yours. They belong to you; they were intended for you. You find that you are one with Christ in such a sense that He makes Himself responsible for everything that can be charged against you. And when you appear in God's presence to give your account, if the indictment is ever read against you at all, you have only to say, "My Lord, Thou wilt answer for me. Thou didst love me, and give Thyself for me. I believe Thy promises. I am Thine and Thou art mine."

That plea will stand for ever. "It is God that justifieth; who is he that condemneth?"

If you are sincere, you have a right to that plea. If you are not a sincere Christian, why not? There is no door closed against you. Christ tasted death for every man. Only your own obstinacy bars the way. Christ entreats you to come unto Him. He offers you His love and His protection for ever. He declares that they who trust in Him shall never be confounded. I call heaven and earth to witness this day that I offer you salvation in God's name. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths. He will lead you to the rock that is higher than any earthly refuge. He will reveal to you your sin and your Saviour. He will cover you with the robe of righteousness, and clothe you with the garments of salvation.

XV.

GOD INCARNATE.

"Unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—*St. Luke* ii. 2.

THIS is God manifest in the flesh, who in the beginning "was with God," and "was God,"—the Eternal Word, by whom the Father made the worlds,—"the brightness of the Father's glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the word of his power." This is the Son, of whom the Father saith, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever. Let all the angels of God worship him." This is Jehovah, the Angel of the Covenant, who appeared unto Abraham; who called to Moses out of the midst of the bush, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob;" who delivered Israel out of Egypt, going before them by day in a pillar of cloud and by night in a pillar of fire; who gave the law from Mount Sinai, and commanded the people to make Him a sanctuary that He might dwell among them; and whose glory was like devouring fire upon the top of the Mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. This is He who communed with Moses from above the mercy seat, and from between the two cherubim, and whose glory filled the house, as soon as the ark was brought into the temple. And this is He of whom the prophets speak, not only as the Giver of the law and the Saviour of Israel, but as the Author of a new dispensation, to be brought in, in the last days. Isaiah sometimes repre-

sents this Saviour and Redeemer as simply God, and at other times as the Elect Servant of God. But he distinguishes this Elect Servant by such names as Immanuel (God with us), the Mighty God, the Prince of Peace; and so describes His character and appearance that we recognize, under all the descriptions and designations, the Angel of the Covenant, the God of Israel, for whom the people are commanded to wait. Later prophets give the name of Jehovah to the Person who was to bring salvation under the new economy. Zechariah has these words, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion, for, lo! I come; and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And thou shalt know that the Lord of Hosts hath sent me unto thee." Here the Son speaks of Himself as the Lord, and as sent by the Father—"I will have mercy," we read in Hosea, "upon the House of Judah, and will save them by the Lord their God." Micah foretells a "Ruler in Israel, that was to come out of Bethlehem, whose goings forth have been of old, from everlasting." Jeremiah says expressly that the new covenant was to be made by the same Person who had made the old; "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel, and with the House of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day that I took them by the hand, to bring them out of the land of Egypt. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the House of Israel; I will put my law in their inward parts and write it in their hearts, and will be their God, and they shall be my people." And, referring to this very covenant spoken of by Jeremiah, Malachi, the last of the prophets, announces the coming of the Messiah in these words, "The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger (or angel) of the covenant, whom ye delight in." "The angel who had appeared to Abraham, to Jacob, and to Moses,—who had made the old covenant with Israel,—who had been worshipped in His own temple at Jerusalem,—is here called the Angel of the covenant which was to be established upon better promises."[1]

[1] Dr. G. Hill's 'Lectures,' book iii. chap. v.

He, Jehovah the Messenger, was to visit His own house, which had been originally built in His honour, but which, after the destruction of the building erected by Solomon, had been without the Shekinah, the visible symbol of His presence. By His coming to it, the glory of the latter house was to be greater than the glory of the former, because no symbol, however sacred, no decorations however costly and splendid, could be compared with the actual presence, as a visible person, of the Lord of Glory. The very remarkable prophecy in which Malachi announces that the Lord, the Messenger of the Covenant, shall suddenly come to His temple, is found at the close of the Old Testament, and in the beginning of the New it is applied by St. Mark to Jesus Christ; and any one who will, diligently, and without prejudice, examine for himself, may see that as "all the divine appearances made in a succession of ages are referred in the Old Testament to one person, who is called both Angel and Jehovah," so that Person is declared in the New Testament to be "God manifest in the flesh,"—the offspring of David,—the Son of Man and the Son of God,—the child of the Virgin Mary, heralded by a choir of the heavenly host,—born in Bethlehem, laid in a manger!

> "Cold on His cradle the dewdrops are shining,
> Low lies His head with the beasts of the stall;
> Angels adore Him in slumber reclining,
> Maker and Monarch and Saviour of all."

It is this birth,—this manifestation of God in human nature,—this amazing advent of the Saviour of the world, in circumstances of the deepest humility and abasement, that we are here this day to celebrate.[1]

But, it may be said, "If all this really is as you have represented it, how can any persons who profess to receive the Scriptures as authority, deny that Christ is very God of very God?" This requires to be answered.

There are two classes of objectors,—the Arians, or followers of Arius, and the Socinians, or followers of Socinus.

[1] Preached on Christmas Day.

The Arians admit that Christ existed before all other creatures, and that He is higher in dignity than angels or archangels; but they maintain that He is not God. They say that "the person whom the Scriptures of the Old Testament call both Angel and Jehovah is a created spirit, who was allowed to personate the Almighty, not only speaking by His authority, but appearing in His person, and bearing His name; and that, having, in the name of Jehovah, conversed with the patriarchs and given the law, he came in the last days in His own person,"[1] as a human child, born of the Virgin Mary.

The Socinians will not admit this. They utterly deny the pre-existence of Christ. They regard Him as a mere man, though very eminent for power, wisdom, and goodness. They allow that He was a messenger sent by God, and that He was rewarded for His obedience to God, His goodwill to men, and His patience under suffering, by being raised from the dead and exalted to the highest honour,—being constituted at His resurrection Lord of the creation, and entering at that time into a kingdom which is to continue to the end of the world. Some of them, following Socinus, have said that Jesus ought to be worshipped, on account of the dominion to which He has been raised; but this is not now the prevailing opinion.

Socinianism is continually changing; and what passes under that name is a different system in different countries, and even in different congregations in the same city.

Arians and Socinians often call themselves Unitarians. Both parties deny the divinity of Christ. The Arians admit His pre-existence for ages as the Son of God. This pre-existence the Socinians do not admit.

The Socinians, therefore, do not allow that Christ ever appeared under the Old Testament dispensation. They argue thus:—"None but God ought to be worshipped; Christ is not God; therefore, all the passages of Scripture which seem to ascribe worship to Him are to be explained in such a sense as to be consistent with this

[1] Dr. G. Hill's 'Lectures,' p. 233.

conclusion." That is a very common way of arguing, among all sorts and conditions of men. But if the Scriptures must bend to a foregone conclusion, it is of no use to quote them as authority.

The Arian reasoning is more subtle, and, therefore, more difficult to meet. The pith of it has been thus stated:—"Supreme worship is due to God; but inferior worship may be paid to a creature. It is only inferior worship that is paid to Jesus Christ in Scripture. Therefore, although He be worshipped, he is a creature."[1] You perceive at once what a wide door is opened for controversy, as to the sense of the phrase, "inferior worship." They say, it is only inferior worship that is paid to Christ in Scripture. Let us look into this. Our Lord himself says, that "all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews applies to Christ the words which the Psalmist represents as spoken by the Father, "Let all the angels of God worship Him." St. Paul says to the Philippians, that "at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow." As He was carried up into heaven, the Apostles "worshipped him." The martyr Stephen cried with his dying breath, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." The Epistles contains many petitions, addressed to Jesus directly, and in which His name is joined with that of God the Father. In the Book of the Revelation, Jesus receives the adoration of all the host of heaven. The four-and-twenty Elders, who fall down before Him that sitteth upon the Throne, fall down before the Lamb also; and John heard every creature in heaven saying, "Blessing and glory be unto him that sitteth upon the Throne, *and* to the Lamb, for ever and ever." Was that inferior worship?

But I would not even glance at controversy on Christmas Day, further than may be necessary to clear the truth. There is reason to believe that Arianism and Socinianism are both giving way, either to the old doctrine on the one hand,[2] or to blank infidelity on the

[1] Dr. G. Hill's 'Lectures.'

[2] Witness 'The Suspense of Faith,' by the Rev. H. W. Bellows, New York.

other. New phases of thought and speculation are growing up around us. We see in the Bible some things which our fathers did not see: but the simple articles of the Apostles' Creed are coming into bolder relief every day, as truths that defy the rage of controversy and the tooth of time. Students of Scripture in different countries are beginning to see that the Redemption of the world is a far larger and grander scheme than was imagined by the divines who met at the Synod of Dort. But they see, at the same time, that the truth stands, and must for ever continue to stand, on the old foundation,—the deity of Christ, and the continuousness of His manifestations through the two economies, and on into the far-reaching vistas of the future opened up in the Apocalypse. The Arians, as well as the Socinians, set out with the assumption of the very point which they ought to be able to prove, if their opinions deserve to be listened to. They assume that it is incredible that the infinite God can unite Himself to a created nature. Even the Arians are thus obliged to take great liberties in the interpretation of plain Scriptures. They say that the Jehovah of Zion, Jehovah the messenger of the covenant, Jehovah the angel, was a creature deputed to act for God. Yet they confess that "he calls himself Jehovah, and positively prohibits the worship of any God but himself: 'Thou shalt have no other God before me,' thereby seeming to forbid the worship even of the Supreme Jehovah." Their answer to this immense difficulty is, "That the Hebrews were very far from being explicit and accurate in their style, and that it was customary for prophets and angels to speak in the name and character of God."[1] These are the words of one of their ablest apologists.

But where in the Scripture does one person, whether prophet or angel, sustain the character of another, and speak and act in the name of another, without any hint that he is doing so? In the poetical parts of Scripture there is occasionally, by an abrupt transition, a change of persons, where the change is not formally notified. But that is the licence of poetry, and is very different

[1] Dr. Clayton's 'Essay on Spirit:' see Hill, p. 234.

from the case before us. "Here is a person sustaining the name and character of God most High, from one end of the Bible to the other; bearing the incommunicable name Jehovah; sitting in the Throne of God; dwelling and presiding in His temple; delivering laws in His own name; giving out oracles; hearing prayers; forgiving sins. And yet these writers would persuade us that this was only a tutelary angel; that a creature was the God of Israel; and that to this created intelligence all their service and worship was directed; in short, that the great God was pleased to give His glory, His worship, His throne, to a creature!"[1] What is this but to make the whole Jewish law a system of idolatry, though idolatry was the very evil which it was most expressly designed to prevent?

That Christ is God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost, is the foundation-truth of the Christian religion. He "whose voice once shook the earth," and who at a day yet future, shall, according to His promise, "shake not the earth only, but also heaven"—He who shall come in glorious majesty, with His holy angels, and myriads of saints, to judge the quick and the dead, took upon Him our nature, the likeness of sinful man, and appeared as a human babe in Bethlehem, as at this time, nearly nineteen hundred years ago. "Now above the heavens He's king," and He must reign till the last enemy be destroyed. Hallelujah!

"Oh for a heart to praise my God!
A heart from sin set free."

This is a joyful day to us, if we can say "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord;" "to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

But if any of you, either in words or by your conduct, deny the Lord who bought us, if any of you are crucifying the Son of God afresh, by despising His truth and making light of His salvation, does not the return of this day, at the close of another wasted year, move you to

[1] Dr. Randolph; see Hill, p. 234.

pause and consider, ere you go hence, and are no more seen among the living? To the fever-stricken soul, exhausted and fainting after a career of sin, the story of Bethlehem, believed, is the new birth of hope. It comes like a fresh breeze breathed in through open windows in hot and sultry weather, and finding its way to the innermost room. Brooding mists and unwholesome exhalations flee before it. The sky becomes clear, the atmosphere pure. The whole spiritual nature awakes to new life. Blessed revival! Happy change!

XVI.

GROWTH GRADUAL AND SECRET.

"The kingdom of God cometh not with observation."—*St. Luke* xvii. 20.

In a manger at Bethlehem Christ was born. The event was announced to the shepherds by an angel; but the great world knew nothing of it. The wise men of the East were guided from their own country to the birthplace, by what was to them a sign in the heavens; but it appears that the sign was either not observed or not understood by any but themselves. In Jerusalem, the far-famed metropolis of Palestine, only six miles distant from the birthplace, the event seems to have attracted no attention. Our Lord when eight days old was presented in the temple, according to the requirement of the Mosaic Law. The officiating priests must have seen the Infant Saviour. The aged Simeon took Him up in his arms, and blessed God, and uttered a prophecy concerning the child; and while he was yet speaking, Anna the prophetess came in, and "gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all those that looked for redemption in Jerusalem:" and yet Herod the Great, then king of Judea, knew nothing of the matter till the wise men arrived from the East to inquire where the King of the Jews had been born. The public were either entirely ignorant of what had happened, or they did not believe it, or they were indifferent about it.

When the infants of Bethlehem were put to death by order of Herod, the murder seems to have excited no sensation in Jerusalem. The work was probably done

secretly and suddenly; and though the bereaved mothers wailed for their slaughtered babes, and their neighbours must have witnessed their distress, what did this matter to the multitudes in the great city hard by? Bethlehem was a village. The number of infants under two years old in so small a place may have been perhaps a score, or a few more or a few less. The world rolled on as if nothing had happened. Joseph and the Virgin Mary went into Egypt with the child Jesus, but they were not missed; and when they came back, after Herod's death, they were not noticed. They went away north to Nazareth, and dwelt there year after year in obscurity. At twelve years of age Jesus went up with them to the Passover, and His questions and answers astonished the doctors of the law in the temple. But he was allowed to return to Nazareth without any particular investigation of His character and claims; and there He remained for eighteen years, probably working as a carpenter, and, after Joseph's death, perhaps supporting His mother Mary by the labour of His hands. For it must be inferred that Joseph died in the interval, though the circumstance is not recorded: as Mary and those called the brethren and sisters of Jesus are mentioned repeatedly during our Lord's ministry, without any mention of Joseph as being with them; and, at the cross, Jesus gave His mother to the care of the beloved disciple, which would not have been done had Joseph still lived. Under such humble circumstances did the Lord of glory appear among men, that His advent attracted no general observation,—no attention at all, except among a few nameless persons, and in the mind of the jealous and cruel Herod.

And even after He had been thirty years in the world which He came to redeem, and had actually begun His ministry, though the common people heard Him gladly, and followed Him in crowds to witness His miracles of healing, still, beyond the very limited district to which His journeys were confined, He continued to be unknown; and even the High Priests, Chief Priests, Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes of Jerusalem despised and rejected

Him as an impostor and blasphemer. It was in answer to some Pharisees that He uttered the words of the text.

"He was demanded of the Pharisees when the kingdom of God should come. He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation." That is, no outward pomp or public demonstration, to impress the world at large, accompanies the establishment of this kingdom. The kingdom of God was among them at that very moment when they were asking about it. It was already being established in the hearts of the disciples, and some of those disciples were to be the teachers of mankind. But, the Roman world at that time took no notice. Athens and Alexandria knew nothing concerning it. It was the will of God that this kingdom, which is one day to fill the whole earth, should be founded in circumstances of outward obscurity, and should grow silently and gradually, like mustard-seed or a harvest of corn.

But what attracted at first so little observation, began soon afterwards to leaven society and move even the great Roman empire. People saw the results, but they could not understand the process. A something stirred in men's minds; and they began to inquire when they heard of Christ; and they felt an inward attraction to the new doctrine; and by-and-by the love of Christ constrained them, and they became real missionaries of the Cross within the circle of their influence. And then the holy flame passed from heart to heart, unseen and unobserved. Like the jailor of Philippi, one cried, "What shall I do to be saved?" Like Lydia, the seller of purple, another felt his "heart opened by God to attend" to the things which were spoken by Paul. And thus, by slow degrees, and after terrific persecutions, the doctrine of Christ spread from sea to sea and shore to shore, till there was not a country in the known world which did not in some degree feel its influence.

Yet even now, though the knowledge of the Gospel is widely diffused, and is spreading every year, the "kingdom of God cometh not with observation." The process

of conversion is going on silently and very slowly, like the leaven in the meal. Even now we have to walk by faith and not by sight.

Let us not imagine that because crowds flock, in their carriages and on foot, Sunday after Sunday, to our various churches, this demonstrates the prevalence of vital Christianity among us. God does not save men as crowds, but as individuals, one by one. A man comes to church because he sees others coming; and when he listens, he begins perhaps to feel what he never felt before, a longing after spiritual food; and this first sensation of the soul's hunger goes on increasing, though no one knows it but the man himself. He begins to read the Word of God, and to find a kind of food there which satisfies and fills his soul. Now he prays to God in earnest, "Lord, evermore give me this bread!" and thus he becomes a real Christian, he knoweth not how. God hath done it in his own way, and the man is a new man, a changed character as to his aims and pleasures and prospects. He feels that he is different from what he was formerly; and yet this change, which to him personally has been so great an event, is unknown to the public, and only gradually observed by his most intimate friends. The kingdom of God has been acknowledged and established within him, but it came not with observation. The seed has taken root, and it is growing, and it will bring forth much fruit in due time. But only God knows the process, and witnesses what is going on silently though powerfully in the awakened soul. The love of Christ is stirring the man's nature to its depths, and the effects must ultimately show themselves. But what does the world at large know or care about it? Nothing. Cases like this are occurring every day undoubtedly, though very few are heard of. The Gospel is making its way; the leaven is working; but there is nothing loud or demonstrative about its progress. It was not intended that there should be; because "the kingdom of God," in each converted soul and in society at large, "cometh not with observation."

How many of us have felt this power? None can

know that but God, who sees the heart. But you may know, each for himself, each for herself. What is the strongest desire of your heart? Is it to be like Christ, as far as a created being can be, and to serve God with all your heart and soul acceptably now and for ever? If that is the strongest desire of your heart, you are won to the kingdom of God by the power of the Holy Ghost showing you Christ's love to you and producing in you true love in return. You can say, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon the earth that I desire in comparison of thee. God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever."—"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me." If this sounds to you like enthusiasm or fanaticism, then the kingdom of God, which cometh not with observation, has yet to be set up within you. You have not yet really believed and known how Christ has loved you, and what He has done for you. You have not yet felt your need of a Saviour, your lost condition while wandering far from God. You have not yet said heartily, "I will arise and go to my Father." Then what is to be done? Pray to God earnestly, call to Him mightily; read the recorded words of your Saviour and those whom He inspired, and ask the Holy Spirit to shine into your heart, and to make your heart burn within you while you read; and assuredly the Lord will hear and answer, if you resolve to give yourself wholly to Him; for He is seeking you as you never sought Him; He is waiting to be gracious; He will deal with you in His own way, and He will give you the grace you need, and help you from day to day, according as you wait upon Him and devote yourself unreservedly to Him. Then what are you going to do? Will you begin now, if you never began before, to seek the Lord, and to test the truth and power of Christianity by your own personal experience? Argument to prove the importance of the subject cannot be required by you. You know how important the eternal union of your soul to Christ must be. Will you close your mind against

the truth? or will you receive and embrace it? Your position in a future world may depend on your deciding now. I say this advisedly. Can you show one good reason, one that will satisfy even yourself, for rejecting what I say?

XVII.

THE KING OF MANKIND.

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?"—*St. Matt.* ii. 2.

He was then a babe in the little town of Bethlehem: He is now in the same human nature at the right hand of the Majesty on high; angels and principalities and powers being subject unto Him. The wise men of the East came to seek "the King of the Jews;" they found "the Saviour of the world." That they were divinely directed is evident; what their ideas were concerning the mission of the future King is not so clear. They were astronomers and astrologers. They are supposed to have been Chaldeans or Persians, and priests of the Zend religion, which taught them to expect a Redeemer in the person of a Jewish child. "We have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him," said they to Herod in Jerusalem, after having come, at least, a seven months' journey. Whether the star was a star-like meteor specially appointed by God, or the natural phenomenon of a conjunction of two planets, it is not easy to determine. The astronomer Kepler was the first to observe that, about the time of our Saviour's birth, Jupiter must have presented to astronomers, in so clear an atmosphere, a magnificent spectacle. There were three conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn between May and December. In May, the planets rose in Chaldea about three and a half hours before the sun. Their conjunction must have attracted the notice of men devoted

to the study of the stars. From the end of May, the planets must have appeared to separate slowly till the end of July, when their motions became retrograde. They again came into conjunction at the end of September. The wise men were then on their way to Jerusalem. Jupiter was at its most brilliant apparition, being at its nearest approach to the sun and to the earth. This remarkable spectacle continued almost unaltered for several days; when the planets again slowly separated, then came to a halt, and then approached to a conjunction a third time, just as the Magi may be supposed to have entered Jerusalem. There, about an hour and a half after sunset, the two planets might be seen, high overhead in the direction of Bethlehem. The astronomical facts are beyond all question. They are as much a matter of certainty as the multiplication table. But both the month and the year of our Saviour's birth have been questioned; and these are points which we cannot now discuss. The subject is of only secondary importance. It is true that matters of even secondary importance, in relation to the greatest event in the history of mankind, are well worthy of attention. But the grand thought for us to-day is, that Christ, whether they will receive Him or not, is the Lord and King of the Gentiles, as well as of the Jews, and that our chief business in life is to seek Him, and find Him, and worship Him, and devote ourselves and our gifts to Him; assured that in all sincere seeking we shall be guided by heavenly light, and defended from the malice of our most dreaded foes.

That there is "one God and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all;" that "in him we live and move and have our being;" that He is no respecter of persons; that He revealed Himself of old, at sundry times and in divers manners, not to the Jews only, but also to persons of other nations, is the teaching of Holy Scripture. And in the case before us it is clear that the wise men of the East must have been directed by the Spirit of God rightly to interpret the divine will as to their duty, when they saw in the heavens what was

to them a new sign. Balaam, who speaks of himself as "brought from Aram, out of the mountains of the East," had been commissioned to utter these prophetic words: "I shall see him, but not now; I shall behold him, but not nigh. There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel."—"Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion." Whether these wise men of the East were acquainted with the recorded predictions of Balaam, who, fourteen hundred years before, had been a wise man of the East, and a true prophet of God, though a wicked one, we cannot say. There is nothing improbable in the supposition that they had such knowledge. The Jews had been long captive in Babylon. Many of them were scattered over the East. The contents of their Scriptures must have become widely known among the more thoughtful of the Gentiles. However this may have been, God certainly directed the Magi. The appearance of a star-like meteor, or the conjunction of two planets, or even acquaintance with Balaam's prophecy, could give them no hint that a King of the Jews, worthy of their worship, was then about to be born, and that they were at once to proceed to His birthplace. They must have had some distinct communication from God, either directly or indirectly. As the Messiah's birth was announced by an angel to the Jewish shepherds, so it was announced by a star to these wise men of the Gentiles, as if to intimate that the time drew nigh when the true religion should no longer be confined to a particular people, but should be thrown open equally to all the nations of the world. This was the inauguration of a glorious era in the history of mankind. The blessedness of the Epiphany is not yet understood as it will one day be. As the wondrous plan of Providence is unrolled age by age, we see the outline widening, and a grandeur of purpose manifesting itself, which previously was in part concealed. The right interpretation of Scripture, which was long prevented by the narrow theories of prominent theologians, is now seen to harmonize more and more with what we otherwise know and feel to be true. The golden dawn is the

sure pledge of coming day. The arguments of infidelity are vanishing like shades of darkness before the advancing light. The hearts of good men were never so full of song. The sublime hymns of the Church, which, a hundred years ago, were looked upon by some English and Scotch divines as more or less the exaggerations of poetry, are felt to be in reality but imperfect expressions of the truths which they embody, simply because language is too poor to express them. The old lights of scholastic doctrine were like lamps in a sepulchre, compared with the sunrise which is now purpling the sea. Bishops and archbishops begin to perceive and to acknowledge that the days of damnatory clauses, denounced against multitudes who believe in the Son of God, have passed away for ever, and that in the Christian religion there is hope, not for sects only, but for the world. For all true progress in this direction, God's holy name be praised!

"Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" said the Magi. Do you and I, brethren, know where He is? Have we sought Him, and found Him,—not as the King of the Jews only, but as the King of the Gentiles also?—the King of nations,—the King of the world,—the King of Kings and Lord of Lords? Have we submitted to Him as our King? That is the practical question for you and me. No soul is blessed in which He does not reign supreme. No soul ever can be blessed in which He is not willingly, joyfully obeyed. Now, when we are entering upon a new year, let us endeavour to have clear convictions about this. Many persons pass their lives in a sort of haze with regard to religion. They neither deny the Gospel, nor do they quite believe it. They are like waves of the sea, driven about and tossed. Sometimes they rise above the level of their ordinary state; sometimes they fall below it. They are never sure where they will be for an hour. They hear a sermon in church, and they think there must surely be something in Christianity. They go home and read an infidel article, and they set the whole down as superstition. Yet this variableness does not greatly disturb them. In

short, they do not consider it of any great importance whether they come to a decision or not. Real prayer in such a state of mind is impossible; and without hearty prayer there can be no profitable study of the written word. Are you prayerless? Are any such among you? If so, let me warn you, anxiously, affectionately. Your houses built upon the sand are tottering to their foundations. You will never be able to live in them. The flood will come ere long, and sweep them all away.

The grace of God hath appeared unto all men, but we must use it,—we must avail ourselves of it; we must obey the Divine light. The wise men of the East might have despised the star, and refused to follow it. The journey was long and toilsome, and, if they did reach Jerusalem, they had no security as to the treatment they might meet. Yet they set out in faith; they braved the jealousy of Herod; they ventured into Jerusalem with an inquiry that startled all who heard it, and they found their way at last, guided by the star, into the very presence of the infant Saviour. Here was the triumph of faith showing itself in action. Strange it is; but we do not read that the chief priests and scribes of the people, who quoted their prophet to prove to Herod that Christ must be born in Bethlehem, hastened to Bethlehem to ascertain for themselves the truth of the rumour that the Messiah had been born. Bethlehem was only six miles from Jerusalem, yet there is not a hint in the Bible that they either went, or sent, to inquire. Nor did they attempt in any way (so far as we know) to stay the murderous hand of Herod, when he sent forth and slew all the infants in Bethlehem. It had been predicted by their prophets that the Messiah should be born there. It was now rumoured that He had actually appeared. Yet these men, so zealous for the law and for the traditions of their fathers, took no steps to prevent the murder of the Deliverer whose advent their nation had for ages expected,—took no steps to discover whether He was the promised Deliverer. Their faith, if they had any, was not of the kind which works by love.

Far different was the conduct of the wise men of the

East. When they left Herod, they saw again the star which they had seen in the East, and they followed its direction till they came to Bethlehem, rejoicing with exceeding great joy. "And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down and worshipped him" [Him, but not her, you will observe], and "they presented unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh,"—gold, as to a king; incense, as to God; myrrh, as to a man. They offered first themselves (in adoration), then their gifts. They had sought the Lord and they had found Him, and their hearts were filled with joy. Then they departed into their own country, and undoubtedly spread the joyful news, for at Bethlehem they must have heard from Mary and others of the angel's message to the shepherds, and of the song that was audibly sung on the night of the Nativity by a multitude of the heavenly host:—"Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men." And this was joyful news to the world. The "desire of all nations" had come,—a pledge that one day, according to the prophecy, the earth should be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

He who was called "the King of the Jews," and who will yet be seen to be their king in a manner of which that ancient people do not now dream,—He, the king of the Jews and king of the world, said, before He ascended into heaven, "Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." If we have found our Lord and king,—if He is enthroned in our hearts as king, then love to Him, and, for His sake, to all our redeemed brethren, is the strongest motive that governs us. Do you feel it to be so? If you do, you are willing to make great sacrifices for Christ and His kingdom,—to present large gifts, in proportion to your ability, for the vast missionary work which He whom you love as your Lord and king commanded His disciples to carry on. You will not require any of the unscriptural arguments used on platforms to induce you to obey, according to your means, the Saviour whom you love. I

do not tell you that the success of Christian missions is astonishingly rapid; for I do not think so. I remember the parable of the leaven, and I know that our Lord intended the process to be slow. I do not tell you that every heathen who dies unchristianized goes down to everlasting flames; because I regard such an assertion as not only unauthorized and incredible, but as the contradiction of many statements made by the Saviour of the world and his inspired Apostles. Paul, Peter, John, were doing missionary work in close contact with the appalling heathenism of the vast Roman Empire. Do you find that they made any such assertion as to the final doom of all who did not then become Christian converts? No! They represent God as gathering an elect Church out of the world, during the present age or dispensation, to be advanced to high honour and dignity in the next. They do not say that the whole world is to be converted in the present age by missionary effort, but merely that the Gospel is to be preached to all nations for a witness, before the Lord comes to introduce a new dispensation. We are bound to do what we can in order that it may thus be preached for a witness. We are to obey Christ's plain command, and leave the result to Him. If, notwithstanding great effort and earnest prayers, the progress be slow, we are not to murmur, but to go on working, praying, contributing, and helping in every way we can. He knows how to govern His kingdom, and how to extend it when the appointed time arrives. For the present we are to live by faith, not by sight. This is part of our discipline. By-and-by we shall see love and wisdom in all its arrangements. Misrepresenting facts, or misrepresenting Scripture, will never forward God's cause in the world. If the love of Christ does not constrain you to obey His plain command, I will appeal to no other motive. The subscription may be large, or it may be small. A small subscription obtained by true representations is better than a large one obtained by such as are not true. This is the season at which we annually appeal to you on behalf of the four great societies at work on missions and education in this immense diocese.

I do firmly believe that "He that soweth little shall reap little, and he that soweth plenteously shall reap plenteously. Let every man do according as he is disposed in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity, for God loveth a cheerful giver."

XVIII.

THE KINGDOM.

"When he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them."—*St. Luke* xvii. 20.

"THE kingdom of God cometh not with observation." "There will be no outward pomp and circumstance to inaugurate my reign. My kingdom is not such as ye look for. My kingdom is not of this world. It is not a kingdom like the empire of the Cæsars. It is of a different *kind*. I have taught my disciples to pray, *Thy kingdom come*. But when it comes, it is not merely in this or that place. My kingdom is not like the progress of an earthly monarch, attracting public observation,—so that men cry, Lo, here comes the king! or Lo, there! My kingdom is set up, not over so many miles of territory, but over men's hearts. My kingdom comes, not with the noise of chariots and processions, but silently like the dawning of the day, conquering the darkness. I come, not on a throne, inlaid with gold and studded with gems; but, as the sun rises on a darkened world and dispels the shadows, so I rise upon the human soul and make day where there was night. It is over the soul that I have come to rule. In short, the divine reign is not an outward thing, as many suppose, and some desire: *Behold, the kingdom of God is within you!* Where Satan reigned, I am come to reign. Where he reigned in the midst of spiritual darkness and confusion, I am come to reign in the midst of light and order, and the due government of the passions. The human will must

be submitted to the divine: and therefore my disciples pray, not only *Thy kingdom come!* but also, *Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven!* I am not come to interfere with Cæsar, but to have a heavenly kingdom in the hearts of many of Cæsar's subjects,—a dominion that shall stretch far beyond the limits of his sway,—that shall go on to be more and more established and extended, long after the Roman empire shall have declined, and fallen, and become a mere matter of history. For my dominion is an everlasting dominion, and my kingdom that which shall never be destroyed."

We are all apt to think of God as only without us,—as filling universal space, governing the suns and stars, and sustaining the order of nature by His omnipotent energy and unfailing laws. But this is only one view of God's government. There is another view which more nearly concerns us. The omnipresent God is present within us. If we seek Him there, we shall find Him. If we listen to conscience, we shall hear His voice. When we are calm and collected and thoughtful, we cannot fail to recognize a presence within us that condemns and opposes what is wrong,—that approves and suggests what is right and true and honourable and of good report. That presence is divine. It is God shining in the soul. It is the true Light enlightening us. It is Christ by His Holy Spirit striving with our old nature. He is doing all that can be done, short of absolute compulsion, to establish His kingdom within us.

Have we, then, submitted ourselves to God? Have we welcomed Him into our hearts, to reign there? Have we dethroned every idol, to make room for Him? Is the Lord Christ ruler over all the land? Have the idols been utterly abolished? Is the reign of love established, instead of the reign of malice and wickedness of every form and every degree? Has this wondrous change come over us? Is the Lord our King? Are His interests ours? Do we feel so identified with Him, that the prosperity of His kingdom is our joy,—that we feel grieved and distressed when men make light of His Gospel? Let us question ourselves thus. Let us find

out whose we are, and whom we serve. We belong at this moment either to the enemies of Christ, or to His friends. Do we say in our heart of hearts, "we will not have this man to rule over us"? or, "The Lord is our King: He will save us"?

Mark the expression, "the kingdom of God." Christ's kingdom is the kingdom of God. Where Christ reigns, God reigns: for Christ is God, one with the Father and the Holy Ghost. Unitarianism is a mere philosophy. It is a valley of dry bones. There is no more life in it than in Mahometanism or Buddhism. There is nothing in it of the warmth or fervour that belongs to life. It was never made for the human soul, the better part of which is its affections. It is like the palace of ice which was built upon the Neva for the entertainment of a Russian prince: and like that glittering palace, with its perishable furniture and ornaments of the same material, it shall pass away. It will melt when the sun shines and brings the warm weather. Christianity is a baptism of love. It is quite different from a mere philosophy of the utilitarian stamp. Those who doubt or deny that Christ is God, never get beyond a sort of outside philanthropy. That philanthropy may be all very well in its way, and useful in its own place. But it is no more living Christianity than a marble statue is a living man. It is nothing but an imitation. It may adorn your name; but it will never change your heart, or bring the peace of heaven into your home. Away with it as a counterfeit! If the whole world were Unitarian, it would still require to be converted. Missionaries of the Gospel would be as needful as ever. The kingdom of God would not be established. God's will would not be done in earth as it is in heaven. For there would be pride, instead of humility—philosophy instead of religion—accomplishments instead of graces; and a mere wax-work caricature of primitive Christianity instead of the kingdom of Christ set up in men's hearts. Brethren, this is true. The history of the Church, and of Deism, proves it. Be not led astray. Unitarianism never could produce, in a million of centuries, a St. Paul or a St. John.

"The kingdom of God is within you." It is not among the stars, or under the microscope, that you will find God; though His works are there. It is in your own heart that you will find Him. He is there, bearing testimony to His own truth in the words of Christ, and His Apostles and prophets: stirring you up to earnestness; reproving your indifference; drawing you to Christ; and giving you new views of the value of His atoning blood and ceaseless intercession. Then commune with your own heart and be still. Hear what God the Lord will speak. "No man can come unto me," saith Christ, "except the Father which sent me draw him."

The Father, by the Holy Spirit's influence in your conscience, is drawing you now, this day, this hour. Yield to that drawing. Submit yourself to God, and you are saved—you are happy—you are blessed for ever. God is waiting to set up His kingdom within you. He wants only your consent. It must be deliberate: it must be entire; it must be hearty. Then the Lord will be your inheritance. Then you will understand why this is not your rest. Then it will be your daily delight to hold converse with God—to pray to Him and praise Him—and to look forward, beyond all earthly clouds, all present trials, all passing perplexities, to unbroken communion and eternal service.

That it may be so with you and me, the Lord in His mercy grant!

XIX.

GOD MISREPRESENTED.

"The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever."—*Psalm* cxxxviii. 8.

If a pious Jew could say this ages before the Gospel was unfolded, shall a Christian have any doubt? The Fatherhood of God is now revealed far more clearly. "The sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty" may be very sure that He "will perfect that which concerneth" them; that He will not leave undone or half-done anything that their interest requires to be done.

"That," you say, "is very comforting to those to whom the promise belongs, the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty; but how do I know whether I can take this promise to myself?"

Then let me ask, Do you earnestly desire the privilege? and in order to enjoy it, are you really willing to give up your sins?

If you say, Yes, then I say, on His authority, that the Lord will perfect that which concerneth you; for you may be confident of this thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. When Christ comes, then shall be "the manifestation of the sons of God;" and you, made perfect in love, shall be among them.

But you think this is too great and wonderful a thing to be true. You wish you could believe it; but doubts crowd into your mind, and you do not feel sure that the good work has even been "begun."

"Begun" it certainly has been if you are, as you say, desirous to be a Christian, not in name only, but in deed and in truth. Such a desire never sprang up in your heart without the grace of God. Such a desire is the work of the Holy Ghost; and if you cherish the desire and act upon it, the same Divine Spirit will continue to help you until He shall have perfected that which concerneth you. What possible ground can there be for doubting this?

And do you know why it is that you have so much difficulty in believing that God loves you, and that He is even now waiting to do for you abundantly more than you can ask or think? One reason is that the devil slanders God to you (the word devil means false accuser or slanderer), and tries to make you think that God really does not care for you; that He is too high to be interested in you, or too severe to be favourable to you. Thus he makes you think of God as a being of whom you must always be afraid, as a slave is afraid of a hard task-master. If you will read any true account of the state of Europe before the Reformation in the sixteenth century, you will find that the devil had persuaded the greater part of Christendom to think thus of God. They fancied that He took delight in seeing His worshippers make themselves miserable by penances and mortifications, and that without these they never could have His forgiveness. No words can exaggerate the bondage in which the people were kept by their confessors. Every inquiring thought was a sin. If a monk or nun avowed, or even felt, strong natural affection for nearest relations —father, mother, brothers, sisters—it was sin, which needed penances and absolution,—so many prayers to be said, kneeling on the stone floor of a cell or a church at midnight, perhaps, in midwinter; so many self-inflicted lashes with a knotted scourge; or so many days of abstinence from pleasant food. God was utterly misrepresented. Few persons had ever seen a Bible. The Church taught for doctrines the commandments of men, and made the Word of God of none effect by her traditions. And is there nothing of the same kind now?

The great argument of the New Testament is this,—God is your Father, and He loves you though you have rebelled. He has sent His Son to redeem and deliver you from the power of evil; and His Spirit in your hearts is urging you to repent and return. Will you not be moved by such love, such grace, such mercy? Will you not love Him who first loved you? Will you not serve and follow the Saviour, who gave Himself for you? Will you not trust for ever in the eternal God, who invites you to do so, who promises to be a Father to you, to care for you, and never to leave or forsake you, who pledges Himself, in short, to look upon you as one with His divine Son who died for you, to blot out and bury the past, and lift you up into the blessedness of communion with Himself henceforth and for ever? This is the great argument of the New Testament; but the devil still misrepresents God, slanders God and His Gospel, and is cunning enough to persuade even learned persons, with honest intentions, to believe and propagate the slander.

We have all been compelled to drink more or less of that poison; its effects are in our blood now; we cannot get it out of our constitution. Its tendency is to produce crouching terror and mean selfishness; because it teaches men to regard the Divine Being as a ruthless tyrant, indulgent and bountiful to certain favourites, but unutterably cruel to the multitude. God forgive the blasphemy!

When Satan tempted our Lord he said, "All these things will I give thee ["all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"] if thou wilt fall down and worship me." What he failed to accomplish then, in the case of our Saviour, he has succeeded in since, to some extent, in the case of many of the Saviour's disciples, not directly, but indirectly. And how? By slandering God, and making men believe Him to be the hater of millions of the human race, the vindictive enemy of millions in every age, whom He brought into existence for the purpose of tormenting them. (This is the plain English of the doctrine, however it may be veiled behind

plausible phrases or technical circumlocution.) He has thus represented God to be a monster of malice and cruelty like himself; and he sees crowds of religious persons with open Bibles in their hands fall down before this false, this hideous misrepresentation, and worship qualities belonging to himself (the devil) as if they were attributes of the only living and true God.

It is in a great degree owing to the success of these machinations of the false accuser or slanderer that you have so much difficulty in believing that God really loves you. But He does love you, more than the tenderest human father loves his child. How do I know that? Because Christ said so. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father which is in Heaven [what! the Father of those evil persons? Yes; Christ is speaking to the evil persons, and He says distinctly, your Father] give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him!" Observe, "how much more"! Why "how much more," unless it be because the Father in Heaven loves even those evil children more than earthly fathers and mothers love their children? Nothing else could explain it. Since you, evil as you are, undoubtedly and confessedly, have a Father in Heaven, who, notwithstanding your wanderings, loves you still, loves you with a deeper, stronger, tenderer love than the most devoted earthly parents bear to their offspring,—then, if these parents, with inferior, earthly, and partly selfish love, willingly give good gifts to their children, how much more will your Father which is in Heaven give good gifts (or the Holy Spirit, the best and most comprehensive of all good gifts) to them that ask him! honestly and earnestly of course, for He is the all-seeing God, the Discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

And think for a moment:—Has the Holy Spirit never begun the good work in you? Look back. Were you never impressed with your sinfulness? Did you never once in all your life resolve to "lay your sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God"—to love Him—to trust in Him—to follow Him? If that was at any time your earnest purpose, your

sincere intention, at that time the Holy Spirit was at work in your heart, according to the promise. But alas! you resisted the grace of God—you went back—it may be, you went back deliberately to your sins. Surely that is to be regretted. Oh, surely that is to be deplored and repented of. Do you not think so? May I not take for granted that you do? If you do, the Holy Spirit is moving on your heart now,—is moving on that great deep which you yourself are not able to fathom,—of which, indeed, you yourself know but little. Now if you are willing to give yourself to God, you may say with confidence, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me." And, my friend, that is a great thing to be able to say. For it implies more than heart can desire or mind conceive. On this point—blessed be God! —all believers must agree. Such confidence as this—founded on the work of Christ—is the truest happiness —the highest good. Here Blaise Pascal and William Penn—the godly Romanist and the godly Quaker—found rest on the one Foundation. For, through mist and darkness, though they see not each other, the essential opinions of Christian men converge, like roads from outlying districts that meet in some great metropolis. The taint of selfishness will foul a whole philosophy: but hearts may be right in the sight of God, when the philosophies are wide as the poles asunder. When the strain and tension of controversy relax, men see less difficulty in bridging many of the chasms that kept them apart. There is an inner movement of thought and feeling, long anterior to the historical movements, of which almost exclusively we read in books. There are still depths of the human mind, far below the upper tides and stormy agitations which are chiefly recorded by the chronicler. The loving heart has a finer and deeper insight into God's truth than the cold intellect of the mere polemic; and in the bosom of the most uncompromising polemic that loving heart may beat. Indeed much of our thinking depends on the temperature of the affections and the current of the will; and thus, as various aspects of outward nature express variously

the thoughts of God, so also do various minds, developed under different culture. And for all this we must make due allowance; and we shall, if we are not governed by passion instead of reason. While therefore we must lift up our voice like a trumpet against gross and indefensible perversions of Scripture, which turn the truth of God into a lie, and the Gospel of great joy into a wailing dirge, we cannot but be thankful that there is a broad platform of charity and mutual forbearance on which all can meet who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Yet our charity and forbearance are to be extended only to the motives and the persons, not to the poisonous doctrines, of those who alter the Gospel. We must be outspoken and unreserved, all of us, in exposing a kind of teaching which misrepresents God, deceives the people, and often drives thoughtful men to wander in the pathless wilderness of Infidelity. Love to God and men requires us to be, not only sincerely convinced of the truth which we uphold, but resolute in unearthing, and hunting down, the falsehoods which undermine it.

I speak as one who has suffered; and I know that there are others not a few, who have suffered for long dreary years from the same cause.

Then let us be co-workers. Let us show by our life and conversation, wherever our lot may be cast, that there are earnest Christians who believe a good deal of the popular theology to be from beneath, and inconsistent with a right interpretation of the Bible or of the Liturgy. To each of us who endeavours to have a conscience void of offence, toward God and toward man, there is immense comfort in the text, "The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me. Thy mercy, O Lord, endureth for ever." Through Christ, this secures our everlasting peace. It is one of those choice texts, each one of which includes all the promises. It comprises all real blessings for time and for eternity. The Lord is not a God afar off, or indifferent. All that concerneth me is considered by Him. All His work is perfect. Each of us is but a unit in a vast scheme: but each of us is one of His offspring, loved by our Father, and governed by laws which He has

sufficiently revealed. If we break the laws, we suffer; and as long as we continue to break them, we must continue to suffer. But God does not hate us, even when we are breaking His laws and suffering in consequence. He hateth nothing that He hath made. He hates the sin, but still He loves and pities the sinners, wayward and rebellious and prodigal though they be. He is waiting for their return. The good Shepherd hath gone forth to seek the lost sheep. The lost sheep is the human race. The ninety and nine that were not lost must be creatures of other races whom we shall know hereafter. Certain it is, that the "ninety and nine just men who need no repentance," never lived upon our earth. And what says the good Shepherd himself about the nature of His search for the lost sheep? Does He merely call to them to come back, without going after them! Or does He merely go out and look at them as they lie torn and bleeding in thickets and in pits and under precipices, and pursued by wolves, without delivering them, or helping them to return? Hear Himself. He speaks of all the lost sheep collectively as one, and says, Doth not the Owner of the sheep leave the ninety and nine "and go after that which is lost until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home," He saith, "rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost." You see that He seeks the poor lost sheep until He finds it; and you see that when He finds it, He brings it home—He carries it home —and His heart is glad,—and He will have His friends and His neighbours in to rejoice with Him,—in short, there will be joy in the presence of the angels of God over the successful mission of the good Shepherd. Ah, how this true representation of God touches one's heart! This is God's representation of Himself, and of His relation to us. How different from the picture which the slanderer drew for John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards! Which will you believe in? Which will you give your children? And in the fifteenth of St. Luke there are companion-pictures to the picture of the lost sheep,—all from the hand of the Master Himself, and all teaching

the same truth, the tender love of God to His fallen creatures,—the earnestness with which He seeks the lost,—the joy with which He fills all heaven when they are found.

Can I allow myself to doubt that if I trust in this loving Father, revealed by Christ, He will perfect that which concerneth me, He will finish what He hath begun? If I believe in Christ, am I not one with Him? Are not my interests identified with His? How, then, is it possible that my interests can be overlooked?

Near, so very near to God!
I cannot nearer be;
For, in the person of His Son,
I am as near as He.

Dear, so very dear to God!
More dear I cannot be:
The love wherewith He loves the Son,
Such is His love to me.

Let each of us, to whom this is felt reality, rejoice in the Lord alway. Let us banish gloomy thoughts and apprehensions as the dark temptations of the slanderer. Let us trust in the Lord at all times, submitting our will cheerfully, unreservedly, wholly to His. Let us say, from the very depths of the heart, "This God is our God for ever and ever! He shall be our guide even unto death."

XX.

FALSE INTERPRETATIONS.

"Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."—*Romans* ix. 18.

In the Old Testament and in the New we are taught to consider mankind as divided into two classes:—those who have been called and elected to the knowledge of the true God, as the Israelites were, and as all instructed in Christianity are now; and those who have *not* been so called and elected, including all heathen, from the ages before the Flood down to the present hour. As the Creator of mankind and the Sovereign Disposer of events, God has permitted by far the greater part of mankind to live and die in heathen ignorance, while He has been pleased to instruct the remainder, more or less, in the knowledge of Himself and of His will. From some He has been pleased to withhold revelation: to others He has been pleased to grant it.

"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." "O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?" Hath not God a right to grant advantages to some which He withholds from others?

Undoubtedly. Yet we must guard this argument against an abuse which St. Paul would have shrunk from with holy indignation;—an abuse which would have

overturned the foundations of all his teaching, and of all true teaching concerning God. The potter's clay is dead matter, incapable of enjoying or suffering. Any comparison between dead clay and living souls must be carefully limited; and if we are speaking of the destiny of those living souls in a state of endless being, the comparison must be still more carefully limited. We must consider the character of God as He Himself hath revealed it. "God is love,"—"not willing that any should perish." We must consider God's purpose in sending His Son as He Himself hath revealed it,—"not to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved;"—"to destroy the works of the devil," through which alone the evil has been wrought that alienates human souls from God and endangers their future. We must consider how God appeals to one whole nation, containing more bad than good, and challenges them to say whether they have been dealt with unjustly or harshly or capriciously; nay, whether they have not been dealt with most mercifully, most graciously, most lovingly,—nay more, whether anything could have been done for them that has not been done. And when all this is considered, it will be plain that such an application of St. Paul's reasoning as would invalidate all this is not a true but a false application of it. Yet the argument in the ninth chapter of Romans has been thus abused. Look at the consequences. The Gospel is made no Gospel except to particular persons. "God is love" only to them. God is not willing that they should perish, but He is willing that all others should perish,—nay, determined before they are born that they shall perish; whereas the Bible says plainly that He is "not willing that any should perish." Instead of having sent His Son into the world "that the world through him might be saved," He is represented as having determined beforehand that only a part of the world should be saved, and that the rest should not be saved. Christ, instead of being "manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil" without exception, is to destroy those works only to a

limited extent, and for the benefit of a limited number. Those of you who are accustomed to study the Scriptures, —those who even attend to the portions of the New Testament which are publicly read here from Sunday to Sunday, know perfectly that I might quote, not three or four passages, but hundreds of passages which this theory of Christianity flatly contradicts, and which therefore cannot be true if this theory is true. Therefore I say, Perish the theory which alters and limits the Gospel! Perish the interpretation on which the theory is based! If whatever St. Paul wrote was true, one part of his writings cannot affirm one thing, while another part affirms the very opposite. His statements must be reconcilable, and the parts "which are hard to be understood" must be consistent with the parts which are easily understood.

But you will say, "How, then, did so many pious and learned divines come to hold this theory?"

When Protestants at the Reformation denied the so-called divine authority of the Pope, this was one of the chief arguments with which Romanists met them:— "How have so many pious and learned divines for at least a thousand years held this theory and believed in the Pope?"

When the Hindoo Brahmins and the Buddhist priests confront the Christian missionary, this is one of their chief arguments:—"How have so many learned men maintained our doctrines for so many centuries if they are not true?"

This method of silencing inquiry and opposing truth by the authority of great names has always been practised, and on the minds of the multitude has had great effect. But if we really desire to know what is true, we must not allow ourselves to be blindfolded by such prejudice.

And it is often easy enough to answer the question, "How came so many great men to believe what is false?" It is not difficult in the case before us.

In the ninth chapter of Romans, St. Augustine and many doctors of theology who came after him thought

they saw the fundamental principle, the philosophy, of all God's dealings with mankind. That chapter certainly contains "things hard to be understood." It says, Jacob and Esau "being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth; it was said unto Rebecca (their mother), The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy." "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth."

These words contain, I say, "things hard to be understood," if taken out from the rest of the Scriptures and regarded as independent assertions made by Divine authority. If so handled they may be made to teach naked fatalism,—that human beings are mere machines, controlled by the Creator in the same way as dead matter,—in the same way as clay is moulded by a potter; —that He makes some to be for goodness, happiness, and honour, and others for wickedness, misery, and dishonour,—that the human will has nothing to do with human destiny,—that all appeals to man as, in any true sense, a free agent are a mockery,—and consequently that responsibility is a mere figment of imagination.

All *that* can be brought out of the passage if taken from its place among the other teachings of Scripture, and received as an isolated expression of the mind of God.

But is this the way to find out what God really intends us to learn from the Scriptures? Is this the way to ascertain the whole sense of any book written by different hands and at different periods? If you proceed in this manner, you may pick out from the Bible hundreds of texts which will appear to contradict the known attri-

butes of God, and thus to overturn the foundations of all religion.

Now what did Augustine and his followers do? They took this ninth of Romans and some similar passages to be the central philosophy of God's dispensations, and they forced the plain passages to agree with their own interpretation of the difficult ones. Surely the very opposite course is the right one. Surely the right course is to take the plain texts and interpret the difficult ones by them, or consistently with them, as well as you can. If you cannot, you must wait for more light. If the whole Church cannot, the whole Church must wait. And this is in fact unavoidable with reference to much of the Old Testament and some of the New. Who at this moment pretends to have ascertained the true and full sense of the writings of the Prophets, or even of the very first chapter of Genesis? No man who is competent to express an opinion,—no man whose opinion is worth listening to.

What, then, are we to do? Are we to neglect the plain teaching of Scripture till we can understand fully its difficult teaching? Certainly not. The course prescribed by common sense is this. Take the plain, practical, unmistakable statements with reference to God's character and purposes and our relations to Him, as the central truths of your belief, and work out from them into the mysterious ones as well as you can and as far as you can. But let no "philosophy falsely so-called" induce you to loosen your grasp of the plain truths which harmonize clearly with God's voice in your conscience.

Let me repeat a few of these familiar sentences. "God is love." This is the central truth of the universe. "God is not willing that any should perish." "God will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth." "God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved." "Christ is a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world." "He tasted death for every man." "As by

the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." "The head of every man is Christ." "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." "If ye love me, keep my commandments." "They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts." "The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." "We love him because he first loved us." "Christ came to destroy him that hath the power of death, that is the devil." "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil." "Christ must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." "When all things shall be subdued unto him, God shall be all in all." "Rejoice in the Lord alway." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart—and thy neighbour as thyself."

These I call plain doctrines—central doctrines, about which there need be no controversy. From these central doctrines, all other truths in the Bible radiate. These texts are from the lips of our Lord Himself, or from the writings of His apostles, Paul and John. When we come to a difficult passage, then, let us look at it in the light of these central truths; and if we cannot understand it there, we cannot at present understand it at all. And we must just wait, and wait with patience, as we have to do with a vast variety of problems which our present knowledge does not enable us to solve.

But what ought we to think of the wisdom of an interpreter of Scripture who takes precisely the opposite course, making the texts "hard to be understood" his centres, and trying to see his own way out from their darkness into the light, and yet resolved to see only so much of the most obvious truths as may be seen from

the place of difficulty and darkness which he has chosen as his central position?

Suppose that from the ninth of Romans (which is the citadel of the popular theology of large bodies of Christians) he takes these words:—"Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated: so then it is not of him that willeth nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. For the Scripture saith unto Pharaoh, even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy; and whom he will he hardeneth."

"This is my stronghold," the theologian virtually says; "this is the great central position of the philosophy of Redemption. Here I see that God hated Esau and hardened Pharaoh. Therefore it cannot be true that He loved them. Therefore when Scripture says, God sent His Son that the world through Him might be saved; and that Christ is the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world—the world cannot mean all mankind, because those whom He hates and hardens, like Esau and Pharaoh, cannot possibly be included. If He intended to take away their sin and to save them, how could he hate and harden them? Therefore all the numerous texts which assert the universality of redemption, and the completeness of the final conquest of good over evil, of the work of Christ over the works of the devil, must be understood not literally, but with great limitations; because it is only those whom, like Jacob, God loved, that can really be meant. 'God will have all men to be saved' must mean all elect men. Christ 'tasted death for every man' must mean every elect man: 'the Head of every man is Christ,' must mean of every elect man; and so on through a large portion of Scripture. And, consequently, it is evident that all promises of blessedness hereafter must be limited in the same way; to the everlasting exclusion of those who (like Esau) were hated by God before they were born, or, as theologians say, from all eternity."

This is neither exaggeration nor caricature. I desire simply to lay before you the unadorned logic of the

theory. In fact, I might state it more strongly without coming up to the statements of the Continental and English Confessions. Very few now-a-days read those Confessions, or know the sort of proofs which are given for such dogmas as the above, and one other more revolting, to which I will not now refer; but myriads hear sermons based on the theory affirmed in those documents, and read religious books inculcating the same dogmas; and hundreds of thousands of Sunday-school children have their minds darkened, and their judgment warped, and all their ideas of the Gospel perverted, by a system of teaching which mixes up a false philosophy with the truth of God.

But it will be asked, "Have you no explanation to give of St. Paul's remarks about Esau and Pharaoh? Did God really hate Esau before he was born? Did God really harden Pharaoh and thus oblige him to be a wicked man, that He might show His Almighty power in delivering the Israelites?" I answer that to maintain such notions is to deny the whole tenor of Bible teaching concerning the character of God, and His dealings with mankind. "Jacob have I loved and Esau have I hated" is a Hebrew form of expression which implies no more than this,—I have preferred Jacob to Esau; I have determined that the younger shall be greater than the elder. God hateth nothing that He hath made. Christ says, that he that hateth not his own father and mother cannot be His disciple. Can anything prove more conclusively that the expression is a Hebrew form, meaning simply that a true disciple must love even his father and mother less than he loves Christ? not, by any means, that he is to hate those whom God in the Decalogue commanded him to honour.

Again, Did God really harden Pharaoh's heart, in the sense of compelling him to be wicked? What says the Apostle James? "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man," *i. e.* in the sense of enticing him to sin. Here again we have another form of expression in which God is represented as Himself

doing what He permits to be done. One example out of many, will suffice: "Is there evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" says Isaiah. Take that literally, and you make God directly the author of all evil, and evil-doers are no longer responsible. Is this the teaching of Scripture, or is it the very reverse? A child can answer. Do I say then, that there is no doctrine of predestination,—no doctrine of election taught by St. Paul? I do not say so; I do not think so. God elected Jacob in preference to Esau, and He predestined Jacob to be greater than Esau; but I nowhere read that He predestined Esau to endless torments in a future state of existence. The Bible contains no such doctrine. God can with perfect justice predetermine before men are born, that one shall be greater and more honoured than another, both in this world and in that which is to come. But the minds which God has given us revolt from the monstrous idea that a man may be created on purpose to be wicked,—compelled to be wicked by the circumstances in which God intentionally places him,—and then punished everlastingly for his wickedness, which, according to the frightful theory, was the very end for which he was created. No man ever can reconcile that with the ideas of justice which God Himself has implanted in the human breast. If you would make atheists and infidels, a sure way of doing it is to propagate such doctrine: and to me it appears an imperative duty, on all suitable occasions, to denounce and expose it.

On an average, about 90,000 infants are born into the world every day; and nearly 90,000 persons die within the same four-and-twenty hours. Of this immense number, the greater part live and die as heathens, and never hear the name of Christ. Christ tasted death for every man; but they never hear of it in this world. It is evident that all this is in the hand of God. He gives one multitude their lot in Christian lands, and another multitude their lot in heathen lands. He elects the former to privileges in preference to the latter, just as He preferred Jacob to privileges which He withheld from Esau. And undoubtedly we should see this to be all

right if we could see the future as well as the present. Privileges and responsibility go together, and the responsibility is in proportion to the privileges. St. Paul says that the heathen shall not be judged by a law of which they never heard, but by their own conscience. Moreover, there is not a hint in the Bible that the probation of the heathen terminates when they die. This is assumed at missionary meetings, but nowhere asserted in Holy Scripture. Look through the New Testament and find, if you can, in the teachings of our Lord or of His Apostles, anything in the least like some of the arguments which are used as stimulants by platform orators on such occasions. They picture to the excited imaginations of a popular assembly millions of Hindoos, Chinese, and Africans, falling into a lake of fire where they are to continue burning for ever because they have never known the Gospel. Now, I ask, where is the authority for this? Where in the Bible can you find anything like it? They quote the text, "He that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned;" and some unhesitatingly apply this to the heathen, who never heard of the Lord Jesus Christ, and, therefore in God's providence had no opportunity of believing in Him. What says our Lord Himself? "If I had not done among them (the Jews) the works which none other man did, they had not had sin." That is, they could not have been reckoned guilty for rejecting me, had I not given them the clearest proofs of my divine authority. Consider this with reference to the heathen,—this principle of universal application laid down by the Son of God,—and you will see what an abuse of Scripture it is to apply threatenings intended for those who know and reject the Gospel, to those who never knew it. The Dean of Canterbury says truly, in a book published a few weeks ago, "The utmost that seems expected, even from the clergy themselves, is to be able to affirm, that the Scripture says so-and-so. But what Scripture says it, with what intent, how far the context is duly had in regard,—these things not one clergyman in ten seems to take into account; still less,

those laymen, who would be ashamed to quote in the same slovenly manner any of the well-known classical authors." I am thankful to find a writer of such acknowledged eminence, daring to speak the truth so boldly. The shameless misapplication of texts of Scripture is a subject to which all the Churches would do well to turn their attention. It is greatly to be deplored, as the fruitful cause of most serious errors. Speakers at missionary meetings, in order to put their case in a striking light, not only make statements for which there is not the slightest authority in the Bible, but statements which really contradict it, which even contradict the plain words of our Lord Himself. Yet surely they have no need to exaggerate. The case of the heathen is strong enough, and touching enough, when truly stated. The authority for missions is divine: the Lord's command to carry or send the Gospel to all nations is explicit. All who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity will prove their love by doing what they can. But it is a fearful thing to misrepresent God—to contradict His Son—to indulge in pious fraud,—and think all the while they are doing God service, so long as the pecuniary result is good. There are many earnest supporters of missions who deeply lament such things.

Nothing tends more to undermine all real religion than unworthy conceptions of God. If I believe that God is unjust and cruel to millions of my fellow-creatures, I cannot sincerely reverence and love Him. For everything in all the arrangements of His Providence there is a sufficient reason, though it may be long before we are able to see it. There must be a sufficient reason for the long-continued prevalence of heathenism, and for the slow progress of Christianity—slow even where the best men work most earnestly. And there must be a sufficient reason why God chose Jacob the younger, in preference to Esau the elder brother,—and the whole nation of Israel in preference to other nations. (It was not on account of any inherent merit in Jacob or in Israel.) And there must be a sufficient reason—and a reason consistent with infinite love, perfect justice, and perfect

wisdom—why He has mercy upon one, directly and at once, while He permits another to be hardened, or to harden himself. In short, there must be a sufficient reason—and a reason consistent with all the divine attributes—for the permission of sin and of all "the works of the devil" which Christ has engaged to destroy; and, at the same time, a sufficient reason for the election of certain nations to privileges at an earlier period than others, and of certain individuals to joint-heirship with Christ, as vessels made unto honour, in preference to others. Further than this we cannot go. The reasons are among the secret things which belong unto the Lord. But the promise is unto us and to our children and to all that are afar off, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call, at whatever time it may please the Lord our God to call them.

We have been called and elected to privileges. On our use of these privileges, through God's grace, it depends, whether we shall become "vessels unto honour," kings and priests unto God, heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.

Let us "give all diligence to make our calling and election sure," that is, to secure the full benefits of our calling and election: "so shall an entrance be ministered unto us abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour." May God in His grace and mercy grant it!

XXI.

TRUTH PERVERTED.

"His mercy is everlasting."—*Psalm* c. 5.

THIS is true, gloriously true. But there is a false way of representing even God's truth. When Satan tempted our Lord in the wilderness, he thought to gain his end by perverting Scripture. In like manner he endeavours, often successfully, to pervert the truth contained in this text. By perverting truth, he gains his end more easily than by teaching error directly. He is always preaching in our hearts; and the substance of what he suggests is always falsehood.

"If God's mercy is everlasting," he says, "why should you be so much alarmed about the threatenings against sin?"

"God does not hate sin so much as many suppose. He is forgiving and merciful. His mercy is everlasting."

"You may, therefore, allow yourself to go on in sin, within certain limits which a prudent regard for your present interest will dictate; for God is not strict to mark iniquity. God is love. God is merciful. His mercy is everlasting."

If a man does not see through the transparent falsehood of these arguments, he must know little of the New Testament. Satan is preaching up God's mercy, in order to produce an effect the very opposite to that which the Gospel is designed to produce.

St. Paul says, preaching truly, "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye yield up your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."

Satan says, preaching falsely, "I beseech you, by the mercies of God, to give yourselves up to self-indulgence, and serve me; for thus you will enjoy the present as well as the future."

All this is familiar to you. You have listened to both kinds of teaching a hundred times. Which do you follow?

During the season of Lent we are expected to devote ourselves in a special manner to the consideration of our sins, and to hearty repentance on account of them. There is a great volume, the leaves of which are seldom turned by the many for thorough examination,—the volume of memory. Like the moth-eaten dust-covered Bible on the shelf, it is not often looked into. Why? Because it condemns the reader. There are blots of sin on every page. But God would have us turn often to those blotted pages in the book of memory, that we may be sorrowful on account of them, and humble, and better able to understand and value Christ's Gospel. Each of us, the youngest, has a biography,—a past which in every case needs atonement and forgiveness.

Now God's threatenings against unrepented sin are fearful; and they must be executed against the obstinate. "Hath he said, and shall he not do it?" "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," as His enemies. "God's mercy is everlasting," but "the wicked shall not go unpunished." There is a hell. There is a place or state which is described by the Son of God as *Gehenna of fire*. And as mortal "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them that love him," so mortal eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, what God hath prepared for them that hate Him. The expressions used in Scripture to represent the sufferings of the lost, are the most terrible that can be put into human language. If

we could get a glimpse of what is at this moment going on in the region of departed spirits,—if we could see for one hour the realities that are set forth in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, we should keep this Lent very solemnly. We should be in a very solemn state of mind, I may say, during the remainder of our days: for probably the recollection of that sight would not allow us to think much of anything else. And that, no doubt, is a reason why God withholds from the living such a vision, however brief, of the state of the dead. We should be unfitted for the business of the present, which God intends us to care for. St. Paul was taken up into the third heaven, and saw things which it is not lawful for man to utter—whether he was in the body or out of the body he could not tell—and things which undoubtedly coloured his whole life afterwards, as the vision of the Saviour in the sky when the persecutor journeyed to Damascus changed the current of his thoughts and life from that date downwards. Accordingly, we find in St. Paul a state of mind very different from that of ordinary Christians,—a tremendous and unceasing earnestness with reference to the things which are unseen and eternal. Every sincere Christian must feel deeply the paramount importance of eternal things; but this feeling is more or less interrupted every day by attention to temporal things. Paul was a man of like passions with ourselves; but the special revelations of the unseen, which had been made to him at different times, appear to have impressed him in such a manner that the remembrance of them was ever present, and stirred him up to a degree of zeal for the salvation of souls which has rarely been reached by any other, and surely never surpassed. Paul knew well the Scriptures which declare that God's mercy is everlasting; but he knew also that God's mercy is by many despised and rejected, and that a fearful doom awaits those who die thus impenitent and unbelieving.

God is love; and God loves sinners. He "so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have ever-

lasting life." But God does not tolerate sin, which is rebellion. He never will, never can, tolerate sin. That is impossible. He is merciful to the unthankful and the evil; but they never can enjoy His favour, which is life, till they truly repent. So long as they continue unthankful and evil, they are against God, and God is of necessity against them.

Now it is of great consequence to bear in mind that no human being can repent and believe without the grace of God,—without the inward operation of the Holy Spirit. If you think you can repent and believe at any time by a simple act of the will, unaided, you are certainly deceived. God Himself, who made you, alone can work this change of mind which results in a change of character. Therefore earnest and importunate prayer is necessary, and the diligent use of all means in your power.

The appointment of a season for specially examining yourself, to see whether you really are penitent for sin, and are availing yourself of the remedy, will be a help, if you use it in the manner intended. But is there not cause to fear that few comparatively do this? Lent comes round once a year, and the special duties of the time are alluded to in sermons; and some go to church on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday, to comply with ancient custom, if from no higher motive. But how many persons in a hundred really give their minds and hearts to the thorough examination of their character and motives as in the sight of God? I appeal to you. How is it with you? Is there any practical difference to you between this very solemn season and any other? Or, if you think it unnecessary to observe any special season, for inquiring seriously whether you have a true penitent heart and endeavouring to get deeper views of the evil of sin, are you attending at all seasons to this, the most necessary business of your life? Can you say so? The observance of ecclesiastical seasons, I know, is not enjoined by God. He leaves every Church, and every individual, great liberty as to outward methods. But He requires a true penitent heart in every wor-

shipper. There is no liberty to neglect self-examination and repentance; and multitudes of earnest Christians have found and do find it a help, to give special heed at each successive ecclesiastical season to the particular subject then specially brought before them. When we think that a particular topic may be more earnestly considered at any time, are we not very apt to defer the time and neglect the topic altogether?

God's mercy is everlasting; but no wise man, who hears the Gospel, will neglect to avail himself of it now. The penalty endured even now by those who go on in sin, is often indescribably terrible; but we may be sure that it is as nothing to what must be endured by the impenitent hereafter. This is most clearly taught in the Bible, and by Christ Himself. Ought we not to pray most earnestly that we may see this as God would have us see it?

Blindness or self-deception here is a frightful evil. We are soon to be, all of us, in the world beyond the grave. God the Father is now drawing each of us to Christ, by the working of the Divine Spirit in our consciences. Woe shall be to any who continue to resist this grace. God's mercy, though everlasting, will not shield such from direst punishment—awful retribution.

God's truth is pledged to this. His word cannot be broken. The sanctions of the eternal Law shall be maintained. Christ saves no man while in rebellion. But He is waiting now to be gracious, and He is ready to save every one of us from our foolishness, and from its consequences. To whom, then, shall we go but unto Thee, Lord Jesus? "Thou hast the words of eternal life." "To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts." God grant, that instead of presuming upon His mercy, we may avail ourselves of it now; and enter now, while we are in the body, on the enjoyment of that eternal life which Christ communicates from Himself to all who believe in His love and yield to His guidance.

XXII.

DIVINE TRUTH RECOGNIZED.

"If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."—*St. John* vii. 17.

WHO, then, is to teach a man to recognize the doctrine of Christ as truly Divine? None can do this but the Holy Ghost. Is any sudden illumination of the mental faculties to be looked for? Nothing of that kind is promised. A simple condition is laid down,—obedience. If any man is determined, by God's grace, to do God's will, and endeavours to walk in the path of obedience, he will not be allowed to mistake our Saviour's teaching for man's wisdom,—he shall know the doctrine to be from God. No explanation is given of the manner in which obedience is made to result in knowledge. We are not able to trace the methods of the Holy Ghost's operation. They are evidently various in different persons. But we know that a humble and obedient frame of mind is a teachable frame of mind, and that while God resisteth the proud, because their pride is itself a spirit of disobedience, He giveth grace to the humble; He favours them; He teaches them.

To do God's will is to be continually doing good, and thus to be Christ-like according to our small measure. God is love. Christ was God manifested. To be Christ-like is to be for ever manifesting love in actual efforts to promote the wellbeing of others, thus following not our own will, but the will of Him who sends us to help our brethren wherever and whenever we can.

The same doctrine is taught in this remarkable passage :—"If a man love me, he will keep my words ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." It is by the Holy Ghost that the Father and the Son abide in a believing soul. Christians are "the temple of the living God" in which the Holy Ghost dwells. This is true of all collectively, and of each individually. A soul in which the Holy Ghost dwells cannot but recognize the teaching of Jesus as Divine. It is the doctrine of love,—love to God and man. The signet and seal of God are upon it. There is a heart-felt adaptation between the doctrine and the wants of the soul. It produces "joy and peace" which are felt not to be of earthly origin. It fills the whole spiritual nature with a glorious hope that is full of immortality,—hope that the believer would not part with for a thousand worlds, because all that is outward and material, however grand and imposing,—however alluring to the eye of sense,—however splendid, magnificent, and embellished with visible adornments, is contemptible in comparison with "a hope so great and so Divine."

Do we, then, believe the doctrine of Christ to be Divine? Are we sure, in our heart of hearts, that it is God's message to guilty man? Do we find that it is fraught with the greatest conceivable relief and comfort to souls labouring and heavy laden under the burden of sin? Having discovered this, do we welcome it? Do we embrace it? Do we study it; trying to see it in all its fulness, endeavouring to draw from it our nourishment and refreshment,—attending to each utterance as to a voice from God's throne in the heavens? Then we know how inexhaustible it is,—that the Lord's briefest recorded remark is sufficient to feed a multitude,—that His words contain a creative power and a manifold application which belong to no other words that ever fell upon the ear or sank into the heart of man. Then we value the Bible as the ark which contains the charter of our redemption, "the sword of the Spirit," and heavenly manna for all who need such food.

If we have attained to this, we must have a measure of "joy and peace in believing;" we must be animated and

cheered by an abounding hope. No man can believe the Gospel and remain unaffected by it. He cannot believe and still go on thinking, feeling, and acting as if he did not believe. He cannot receive the wondrous promises of Christ as addressed to himself and still cling to the world as his most valued treasure. He cannot believe in his heart that heaven lies in one direction while he keeps contentedly steering in another. That is impossible. If any man is living in wilful sin, and allowing himself to imagine that he truly believes in Christ and His teaching, that man deludes himself with a lie.

Perhaps you confess that you are not yet able to see the truth in such a strong light that it is effectually changing your character and governing your conduct. You heartily wish it were so, but at present you must allow that it is not so. Then the text is for you. You are seeking the truth. If you are indeed heartily in earnest, here you find direction from the Lord Himself, who *is* the truth:—"If any man will do" (is resolved to do) "the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Multitudes of speculative questions will remain unanswered, but he shall know for a certainty that the good news of salvation proclaimed by Christ is Divine.

Will you, then, resolve, in God's strength,—in reliance upon His promised help,—to do His will as far as you know it, and in the earnest expectation of receiving such light as you need? Will you watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation? Will you search for truth in the field of Holy Writ as for silver? Will you act upon every accession of knowledge in the fear of God, and without the fear of man, which bringeth a snare? Will you determine now to give your whole heart to God, and to live as in the presence of your heavenly Father and of Jesus Christ, your elder brother, and of the Holy Ghost, who is waiting to sanctify you? Will you make strong efforts to cleanse your heart from everything which you know to be hateful to the Divine Being whom you desire to dwell there for ever? If you will do this, you will put Christianity to the test, and the result is certain. You

will recognize your Father's voice in the doctrine of Christ. It will be your life-long joy to obey Him. You will be lifted up above the trifles that once engrossed and harassed you into a region of calm and peace, and your hope will become every day stronger on the wing as your knowledge grows with your loving obedience.

Surely Divine joy is a blessed thing; and Divine peace is a blessed thing; and Divine hope is a blessed thing. Will you forego all these for the sake of some poor passing indulgence, which you know in your heart to be contemptible, and unworthy of one who feels in any degree the power of an endless life?

You think (it may be) that you are seeking God,—feeling after Him if haply you might find Him. This may be true, but there is a far greater truth than that, which perhaps you may forget, namely this,—that God is seeking *you*. You are His prodigal. He is looking for your return. He desires it; He will do everything that the infinitely holy God can do to secure it. You are His lost sheep; He is seeking you until He find you. You are His lost silver piece; with more than woman's tenderness He is seeking to recover you, for the remains of His own image, though it is nearly effaced, are still upon the coin. Think not for a moment that God is indifferent whether you be found or not. There could not be a blacker falsehood. God loves you, personally, whoever you may be, and however guilty you may be. He loves you as if there were not another of His children in the world but yourself. He has made all arrangements for bringing you back, if you will only come. The one thing He will *not* do is this,—He will not force you to obey Him against your will. You must surrender that; you must yield your will. You have rebelled against your heavenly Father. The universe must see that you repent of your folly and come back of your own accord and sue personally for the pardon which you need, and without which you can have no hope. But the pardon is ready. It is promised. It belongs to you. All that has been settled by our Divine elder brother. You have only to make suitable application, in a right spirit, and it is yours, without

let or hindrance or reservation. There is a place for you at your Father's table, and such raiment as befits the son or daughter of a king.

Knowing this, can you continue in rebellion against God, who is love? If you have doubts and difficulties as to the authority of Christ's teaching, here is your remedy. You are not left without means of solving them. Begin to obey now, at once, and resolutely. If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God. His doubts will vanish. His salvation is sure; his place is ready; his welcome is prepared. God is for him; who can be against him?

Before this month comes round again, who can tell whether you and I may not be "beyond the river"? The Church has been compared to the tribe of Manasseh, —half on this side Jordan, and half on the other. If we are Christ's, it matters little how long or short a time we may be left on the side next to the wilderness. Soon we of this generation shall all have passed away. How blessed for ever shall they be who have done God's will in following Christ, for when they go hence they shall be with Him whom having not seen they loved!

XXIII.

TRUSTING IN THE LORD.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever."—*Psalm* cxxv. 1.

The contrast between a restless, homeless wave, driven of the wind and tossed, and a steadfast mountain which cannot be moved, is one of the broadest that we can think of. These two objects, the wave and the mountain, are used in the Bible to represent the difference between a mind seeking rest but finding none, and a mind steadfastly abiding in the favour of God. Is this representation true? Will it bear to be looked into, analysed, unfolded? Or is there some hidden fallacy, some flaw running across it, some weak point which it would not be safe to press? You say perhaps, "If I could believe this to be God's truth, I would bend my will before it, I would do homage to it, I would receive it into my mind and act upon it." Well, that is a right sentiment so far. If that is the form of your inmost thought, as it appears naked before God, you are honest; and the man who desires to believe need not be afraid to doubt. There is no merit in never having doubted; but no one who is really honest,—I mean candid, upright, and straightforward in the search for truth,—will be content to remain in doubt, so long as there is a ray of hope that, by further inquiry, he may be able to get out of it; and, indeed, what is this doubting but wavering? And what is wavering? The very word is derived from "a wave of the sea, driven by the wind and tossed,"

implying instability, restlessness, a wandering spirit, a changeful temper; so that the doubts of which you complain, however honest they may be, illustrate the figure to which our text furnishes the contrast.

But have we not all experienced, do not some of us perhaps now experience, the restlessness and misery of wavering doubt and inconstancy? The language of your heart may be, "Oh, that I knew where to find Him!—Him in whom others profess to have found rest and peace!" But are you seeking Him?" He is not far from any one of us. Or is your wish a mere sentiment that goes no further, that leads to no effort? If so, what can you look for? In all God's works and ways we see recognized the absolute necessity of using means. For my own part, I believe that in working *miracles* Christ used means adequate to produce the results,—means beyond the reach of our present knowledge, and operating in accordance with higher laws than man is able to discover. Yet to mankind they were miracles, although to other intelligences above us they may seem as simple and as consistent with established law as the growing of corn or the beating of the heart. But we, in our lower sphere of knowledge and of power, cannot make the corn grow or the heart beat. We can only use such means as God ordinarily supplements and makes efficient. We plough the land and sow the corn, and God sends the rain and the dew and the sunshine, thus adding to the means which we can use other means which are beyond our reach; and so the corn does grow. Again, we obey the instinct which prompts us to feed our hunger and quench our thirst, and God sets in motion a wonderful variety of physiological processes within us, thus adding to the means which we can use other means which are beyond our reach; and so the heart does beat, which it would soon cease to do if we ceased to feed the body. In like manner we are taught, partly by reason and partly by revelation, how we are to provide for the wants of our souls, which are not less real than those of our bodies; and if we do use the means which we *can* use, God will add other means

beyond our reach; and thus the soul will live and be in health, and prosper, and rejoice, and be in harmony with God, and all His laws and all His works, and the whole scheme of the universe in all its provinces.

"Oh, but," you say, "where are such Christians to be found out of Heaven? All the Christians that we know are full of faults and weaknesses and imperfections, and these cannot be in harmony with God." Are you willing to adopt that statement of your difficulty? Then you are admitting what is very important. If there are such Christians even in Heaven, we know that they were here before they got there, and that they did not get there without the use of means. And again, if faults and weaknesses and imperfections cannot be in harmony with God, it is clearly desirable that we should in some way be rid of them. Have you, then, any method to suggest which you think preferable to Christianity? If you have, let us be made acquainted with it; but if you have not, why do you reject Christianity? or, if you have not actually done that, why do you even *neglect* Christianity? Nay, I will go further; the argument compels me; I have a right to say, I am bound to ask, why are you not an earnest, zealous, thorough-going Christian? You have admitted what proves that it is plainly your interest as well as your duty.

But I will not slur over the pith of the objection. It would be nonsense to deny that the character of the best Christians is in this life marked by faults and imperfections. More than this, I allow that the faults of Christians are far more numerous and more serious than they might be, if the means of avoiding and curing them were more earnestly employed. But the answer is, that here we are all at the best in a state of imperfection; that having been so long accustomed to slave in the service of Satan, we scarce know how to use wisely, or enjoy fully our liberty under Christ; that the old nature clings to us, even while the new life within us is gradually and surely sloughing it off; and that, just in proportion as we avail ourselves of the means provided by God for nourishing the new nature, He makes that new nature

grow and prosper. If the farmer prepares his land after the manner of a sluggard, or if he sows only half as much seed-corn as the farm ought to receive, there can be no prospect of his garnering a full crop. If you supply your hunger only with highly-seasoned or unwholesome food, and your thirst only with stimulating or intoxicating drinks, there can be no reasonable prospect of your enjoying good health. Why? Because in these cases the right means are not employed to secure the greatest possible quantity of corn, or the highest possible degree of health. In natural husbandry and in spiritual, in nourishing the body and in nourishing the soul, if we use to the best of our knowledge, ability, and opportunity, the means within our reach, God will add the means beyond our reach, and so bless the whole as to secure the best result. "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he that soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully."

My object is to persuade you that my text is true, and to persuade you so thoroughly that you will act upon the persuasion. "They that trust in the Lord" it says, "shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abideth for ever;" which standeth fast upon a firm foundation from age to age, as strong a comparison as the world can furnish to represent stability and permanence. This is true, or it is not true. I think you will not deny that there is sometimes in your breast what may be called an audible whisper, warning you not to resist the Gospel of Salvation by Jesus Christ. To this "still small voice," it may be you have not yet lent a willing ear. At times it arrests your attention in some degree; but you succeeded in shaking off the impression. Your will is against it. You mutter to yourself "superstition!" and the word acts as a charm. But may it not be a charm breathed by the enemy? Judge by its effect. You are afraid of believing in what is called the supernatural. I do not ask you to believe in the supernatural. We know far too little of nature and its limits, if it *has* limits, (for nature and nature's laws extend to wherever the works of God are) to decide whether the supernatural be pos-

sible. We must wait for higher knowledge before we venture to speak positively to this question. But it is a fashion of the day, not new however, to speak of everything as supernatural which is beyond the cognizance of the five senses, or unfamiliar to the ordinary processes of the mind. Yet the five senses are only the gateways by which some kinds of outside knowledge enter into our minds. Not only is it true that there are other kinds of knowledge which must come to us from without; but every particular of all that varied knowledge, which enters by the senses, finds a counterpart in the inexhaustible interior, and thus becomes a parable to the soul evolving new truths, a mould in which new aspects of truth take shape, as well as a hieroglyphic or picture-language in which the heart may speak to itself, to other hearts, and to God. He enables us to unlock the analogies, and extract from them their hidden and infinitely varied meaning. The "ordinary processes of the mind," too, is a phrase very apt to mislead. The whole subject of mental physiology is even now, after the investigations of ages, involved in great obscurity. No doubt there are certain operations of mind common to all individuals of the race: but extraordinary peculiarities, extraordinary combinations of faculty, extraordinary varieties of weakness, and extraordinary developments of power, are constantly to be met with. Who can pretend to say where the limits of these extraordinary manifestations are placed by the Creator? Who can pretend to say that manifestations ten times more extraordinary than any that mankind have yet witnessed may not be possible, may not be within the boundaries of natural law? The gift of predictive prophecy, and the gift called in the New Testament "the discerning of spirits," were extraordinary mental gifts. But who can affirm that such gifts as these implied the transgression of natural law, or the suspension of natural law? All that we are really able to affirm is, that they were extraordinary. To aver that they were supernatural is a different matter entirely. For the present it must remain at least questionable, whether there can be anything strictly supernatural,

although there are millions of things, even around us, which are incomprehensible to us, which are mysterious to us, and which might be truly called supernatural, if the laws of nature did not stretch infinitely beyond our ken, governing areas of reality and fact, with the extent and character of which we are utterly unacquainted. If, therefore, your only objection to being a Christian is, that you are unable to believe in the supernatural, I answer that Christianity does not require you to believe in it. Christianity requires you, and reason requires you to believe in some demonstrated facts of history, with reference to the gift of prophecy and the gift of miracles: for instance, that the coming of the Messiah was predicted ages before He came; and that when the long-expected Messiah did come, He opened the eyes of the blind, He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead, not by the use of any means known to mankind, but by a word or a touch, in a manner that baffled the scrutiny of the wisest men in Palestine, and with an authority that struck the bystanders with amazement. Christianity requires you to believe these things, and informs you that it is impossible, without falsehood, to deny them.

Now let us ask some questions: What is your life at present? How does it appear in the sight of God,—in the light of conscience? You have some plan. You are not building at random, surely. Do what you will, what you build will be in different styles as you grow older. But let your building, I pray you, be something else than a monument to your folly. Let it be worthy of a human being, made in the image of God. Let it be such that you can live in it, without being ashamed. And, first of all, see that it stands on a sound foundation. The noblest palace ever reared by art will fall to pieces if you build it on the crust of a quagmire.

In every man there is some master-motive, some living centre of thought and energy. You are working out *some* scheme. Has it been well-considered? Do you see the end and issues of it? Have you dared to face the conclusions to which you are tending? or, are you living at

haphazard? In what particular thought are you working now? Is your scheme one that befits your immortal nature? Is endless life included in it? Is the power of an endless life recognized in it? or are you cheating yourself by working out a dream, that must pass away like a golden mist when you awake?—not very golden either, perhaps,—for the life-dream of many a wretched man and woman is, as a whole, even while it lasts, dark and dreary and dismal and horrible. And when or where are you to awake from your dream?—for it *must* be a dream if you are without a plan, and it *may* be a dream even if you have one. Consider, then, where you are, what you are doing, and how you are preparing for a state in which you know that by-and-by you certainly shall be. Is this unreasonable? If so, disregard the counsel. But if it is reasonable, if your better judgment approves, are you wise to disregard it? Pause, and define your purpose to yourself. Every mind is a kingdom, but the government is an usurpation until the usurper is dethroned, and the rightful king reinstated. Will a wise man compass his own ruin? Will a wise man be a joint-labourer with his enemy in working out his own destruction? You will not let belief take hold of you, you ward it off, you parry it, you watch against it, as if it were the point of a dagger. What delusion is this? You are fortifying your soul against the greatest friend you can have in the universe; you are doing all you can to turn your heart into an impregnable fortress, which even Christ the Lord shall not be able to take. He is omnipotent, but He will not force the defences. He will not take your castle by assault. He encamps before it with His holy angels: but He will never enter as an enemy. You must fling open the gates,—you must come to meet Him,—you must welcome Him as your benefactor and your divine Friend,—you must show your grief for your long resistance, your unprovoked, ungrateful, mad rebellion, or He will never enter at all. But, if you do not surrender at discretion, you must starve. This is the one alternative. "Choose ye this day whom ye will serve." Baal cannot feed you. He is a dumb idol, more helpless

than the meanest reptile that crawls through the dust. If the Lord be God, follow Him; but, if Baal, then follow Him. I know not what your Baal, your heart-idol, may be. But would you believe the text, if it were written thus: They that trust in Baal,—in this favourite pursuit of mine,—shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved? Mark that form of the argument. Turn down that leaf in your memory. The text is true, or it is not true. If it is not true of the Lord, is it true of the idol before which your whole soul is prostrate? Oh, should you not hide your head with shame? Down with your idol from God's place! Down with it, down with it, even to the ground! Let reason speak. Let conscience speak. Resist not the Holy Spirit of God, whispering within you from day to day, and from Sunday to Sunday; pressing upon you the necessity of immediately returning to the Lord that He may have mercy upon you, and to your God that He may abundantly pardon; and holding up to your mind, by a variety of proofs and illustrations, the eternal truth of the text, "They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but standeth fast for ever."

May our own experience be to each of us the last and greatest proof that this is the Word of God.

XXIV.

JOY UNSPEAKABLE.

"But his delight is in the Law of the Lord."—*Psalm* i. 2.

THIS first Psalm shows plainly that a man may be blessed in this world. The blessedness of a true Christian is not deferred to a future life, though not till then will it be perfected. There is real blessedness, according to capacity, even now. Who, then, is blessed?

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful:

"But his delight is in the Law of the Lord."

He is blessed, as none other can be. "A very dull sort of blessedness this," many no doubt will think:—"being so particular about one's principles and conduct, and taking delight in the Scriptures!"

But it matters not, as to the fact, how many there be that think so. Blessedness in God's eye must be blessedness indeed, though it be thought so by only one or by none. Many think that happiness lies in the very opposite direction. A psalm to suit them, must deny whatever David's psalm affirms, and affirm whatever David's psalm denies. Their life shows what they think. They think that the man is happy who does walk in the counsel of the ungodly, who does stand in the way of sinners, who does occupy the seat of the scornful, and who does not delight in the Law of the Lord. They are seeking happiness, each in his own way, for they have their

own ideas as to wherein happiness consists. And, as the Chinese say that Christianity may be a good religion for the English, but Confucianism or Buddhism suits them better, so these baptized Christians think that avoiding bad company and delighting in the Law of the Lord may have been blessedness to a Hebrew king ages ago, and may be thought blessedness by likeminded persons now; but, for their part, it suits them better to take the other side of the road, and walk in the opposite direction. What, then, remains to be said or done? We can only reason and pray and try to persuade; and, as to the event, time will declare it.

Ah! do we require to wait for that? Does not every day declare it? Did not yesterday warn to-day? Does not to-day warn to-morrow? Does not our whole past warn our whole future? Have you indeed found blessedness in the counsel of the ungodly,—in the way of sinners,—in the companionship of the scornful? Your conscience, your reason, your heart, all testify against you. And if your own heart condemns you, what shall He do, who made your heart, who counts its every beat, who reads its every utterance, who speaks in your conscience? Will He justify what all these condemn?

Yet, on the other hand, it must be said that the preference of the ungodly man for sinful courses is perfectly natural. He is but following out the tendencies of his nature,—the old nature, unchanged, unrenewed, and at enmity with God.

Then where is the blame? Do we blame a blind man for not seeing? a deaf man for not hearing? No; if his blindness and deafness are incurable. But, when Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, giving sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf,—to all who come to Him seeking His aid and seeking it in earnest, then we do affirm that the blind man bears the blame of continuing blind, and the deaf man the blame of continuing deaf. And within this brief compass the whole argument lies. Herein consists your responsibility. You are under the gospel; but you will not avail yourself of its offers. You have access to the divine Saviour of the world; but you will not be

beholden to Him for the blessings which He is ready to bestow. With all your sins and infirmities upon you, you are at "the beautiful gate of the temple,"—in the very porch,—in the presence not of apostles only, but of Jesus Himself. He is here to heal you, to teach you, to bless you, to make you one of His disciples, and to fit you for the heavenly temple, the house of God not made with hands, His Father's house of many mansions: but you keep aloof from Him,—you crouch away in your rags, lest the light of the Lord's countenance should fall upon your misery, and expose it to yourself;—in short, you will not come to Him, that you may have life and light, and spiritual health and everlasting joy. No: you will rather grope about in your blindness, and remain deaf to the music of your Saviour's voice, and stagger from pillar to pillar on your crutches, and cling to your beggary and your tatters, as if you were a Mahometan fanatic believing this to be your *kismat*—your fate. Then this is your condemnation,—and while you remain under it, it dooms you; this is your condemnation, that light is come into the world, but you love darkness rather than light, —why? because your deeds are evil. God knows it, and you know it; and you dare not deny it.

Where, then, is this to end? Do you dream that the whole frame and constitution of God's moral government is to be upset for you? Christ Himself, as man, would not cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, because it is written, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Are you not trampling on His laws and defying His threatenings? Where, then, I ask, is this to end?

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me!" Be this your daily, constant prayer, if you would escape the doom of the ungodly. Are you afraid to pray for the renewal of your nature, because, if your petition were answered, your pleasures would be abridged? St. Augustine confesses that he used to pray, "Lord, convert me; but not yet." He would enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. But what delusion is this? Pleasure depends on the state of mind of the individual.

When the mind is renewed by the Spirit of God, the pleasures of sin would be no pleasures; just as, to the unrenewed man, it is impossible to "delight in the Law of the Lord;" (by the law of the Lord, I understand here, the whole Revelation made of His will). But he whom the god of this world hath blinded, hugs his delusion,—clasps it to his bosom—will not give it up—cannot be persuaded that in the end it is sure to sting like an adder. Is any one here under this delusion,—blinded by it,—kept away from Christ by it? Do you conceive it to be impossible that you, who now delight in the way of sinners and the society of scorners, can ever be made to delight in the Law of the Lord more than you now do in your wrong courses? Why should it not be so with you? It has happened to thousands,—tens, hundreds of thousands of other sinners, some of whom were blackened with every crime and bad enough for the worst society that ever disgraced this earth. Such there have been, who afterwards fought the good fight, finished their course, and kept the faith, and are now with Christ and all the holy departed in Paradise. And such there are now, among our contemporaries,—men and women, whose character testifies, in a manner not to be mistaken, the reality of the transformation which the Spirit of the living God has wrought in their evil nature. Then why should you despair of the possibility of such a change being wrought in you? The grace of God is omnipotent. Why should not you become an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ, as well as they? Christ came into the world to save sinners, including you. Think of that! He will never shut you out from the benefit of His atonement. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." But ask with a sincere desire and earnest purpose to put away all that you know to be forbidden; for if you regard iniquity in your heart, the Lord will not hear. In short, ask as a person must ask who really wants and expects what he prays for, and God will grant you true faith in His adorable Son,—that faith which works by love and overcomes the world,—that faith which gives daily delight in the

Law of the Lord, and makes an earthly home, however humble, a precinct of heaven. All this is available to you, whatever your bias to evil may hitherto have been, —though you may have moved in the very vanguard of the enemy, and attained a bad renown among your comrades by fighting foot to foot against all truth and godliness. To you the Prince of Peace, from His throne in the Heavens, holds out the sceptre this day. He invites —he entreats you, to come unto Him that you may have life,—that you may secure through His merits the blessedness of the godly, and find your delight for ever in the Law of the Lord.

And to those of you who have already come to Him, and who now can say, as in His presence, that your delight is in the Law of the Lord, there are exceeding great and precious promises set forth in this short psalm. Hear what it says of the blessedness of the man whose "delight is in the Law of the Lord." The promises are in few words, but are they not exceeding great and precious?

"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Is not this blessedness for time, blessedness for eternity? "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Short-lived are their pleasures; many and great are their miseries; dark are their prospects; deplorable is their end. From year to year their schemes of happiness burst and collapse. The hanging gardens of their Babylon are undermined and swept away by the dark river. The cloud-capped pinnacles of the greatest and mightiest among them are overturned and rolled in the dust. Fearful it is to see them tottering to their fall, while the builders are overwhelmed and buried in the ruins. Men pass by, and lo! they are gone! and their place knoweth them no more.

> "Their hatred and their love is lost;
> Their envy buried in the dust;
> Their memory and their name is gone,
> Alike unknowing and unknown."

But the righteous shall be had in everlasting remembrance, while the memory of the wicked shall rot. The trees planted by the rivers of water shall bring forth their fruit in due season, in the garden of the Lord. Their leaf shall not fade; their beauty shall not perish; their fruitfulness shall not cease; for the sunshine is on them by day, and the dew of heaven by night, and their roots are nourished by the river of the water of life. They are planted in holy ground. Their prosperity shall be perennial; their glory eternal.

Oh, then, when we see this contrast, to which all experience and all history bear witness, shall we not praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works unto the children of men, in making those who receive Him the children of God, happy in the consciousness of His love, and delighting in the holiness of His law? Shall we not beseech Him to have pity upon those who are still abiding in darkness? Shall we not beseech Him to show them His marvellous light? For they are His offspring as well as we; and who maketh us to differ? Whatever advantage we have over any of our brethren is exclusively and entirely of the grace of God. But if we truly love God, we also love our brethren, not only those who are of the household of faith, but those who are beyond that pale. It is not possible that our delight can be in the Law of the Lord if we are without sincere love to our neighbour, which that Law enjoins. And if we are under obligation to love all our brethren of mankind, and earnestly to pray for them, and do them good as we have opportunity, what shall be said if we regard with indifference the ungodliness of our own families and friends and acquaintance, who are all more or less within the circle of our influence? There is no such thing as a selfish and self-complacent Christianity. No man can delight in the Law of the Lord who does not delight in doing good to those among whom the Lord has placed him. And without earnest, importunate, unceasing prayer, all our attempts to do good will come to nothing. God is answering thousands and thousands of prayers every day and every hour of the day. If you

delight in the Law of the Lord, you know that He has answered yours. Then go on praying; continue instant in prayer, for yourself, for your relations, for your friends, for your enemies, for Christendom, for the world. Pray for all whom you are bound to love, and you will by-and-by come to love all for whom you are bound to pray; and as you find your heart expanding, you will find your view of God's revealed will expanding. Your horizon will not be a year hence where it is to-day. As you rise above the world into the pure atmosphere of divine love, you will see truth more and more as God sees it. In His light you will see light. You will see that the universe was not framed on the plan of the Westminster catechisms, or even of the Thirty-nine Articles; and that delighting in the Law of the Lord is a different thing, and a far greater thing, than delighting in such documents as these, though they contain much truth moulded into the shapes of man's logic. You will find that no Church, however grand its history and antecedents, has a monopoly of the whole counsel of God, much less any paltry sect of overweening dogmatists walking in their pride. You will find that the Law of the Lord, the Revelation of His will, has often been shut up in earth-grown timber, as the stone tables once were kept in an ark or chest. You will find that the Law of the Lord is an expression that covers an infinite idea—an idea wide as the universe which that Law controls, and unchangeable as the Being from whom it proceeds. The consideration of this truth will lift you up above all bondage to narrow commentaries, by whomsoever written, whether by Jewish rabbis, Christian Fathers, or more modern divines. You will go to the fountains; you will study the pages of Holy Writ with prayer for the aid of the Divine Spirit, and observing the harmony between God's voice in the Word and God's voice in your conscience. Thus you will find new treasures day by day; for the pure in heart shall see God in His revelation. And as you advance into new regions of thought and higher spheres of knowledge, it will continually and for ever be to you a truth of experience that your "delight is in the Law of the Lord."

XXV.

SPIRITUAL BIRTH.

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."—*St. John* iii. 3, 5.

A GREATER subject it is not possible to conceive. How are we to see the kingdom of God? How are we to enter into the kingdom of God, and rejoice in the reign of God? We are naturally unwilling to submit to His rule. His law is irksome: His service is burdensome: His Revelation is disbelieved or uncared for: His Gospel does not stir in the heart one emotion of joy. But we are His creatures. We are in His presence,—never out of it. We are in His power; and, by-and-by—in fact, very shortly—we shall be before His tribunal. Is not this, then, a question of great, of unparalleled interest?—how we who are not in harmony with our Father,—not at peace with our Creator,—not obedient, not faithful, not loyal to the King of the Universe and "the God of the spirits of all flesh" (Num. xvi. 22), may become His joyful subjects, His honoured servants, His loving children? For this, observe, is what the Gospel reveals. This is the design of redemption. This is the meaning of the Christian religion. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested. With a view to this He now governs the world: and, till this is accomplished, the design of His advent will not have succeeded, the glory of His triumph cannot be complete. Hear, then, His own words, and let us try to understand them. "Except

a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler, came to Jesus by night, and said "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him," "*We* know:" this implies that he was not alone in his opinion; that the subject had been discussed among those with whom he associated; and that they could come to no other conclusion than this, that the miracle-worker was acting under a divine commission, and that, in proof thereof, He had been gifted with extraordinary powers. The Evangelist mentions just before, that "when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover, in the feast-day, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." These things were not done in a corner. The facts were known to the Sanhedrim, and to all the dwellers at Jerusalem. The holy city was always crowded at the feast of the Passover by the Jewish families which came up from every part of Palestine, and by devout men from the various countries into which the Jews had been scattered. The news that the miracles had been wrought had, therefore, immediately a wide circulation. The Jews had long been looking for the advent of their promised Messiah: and the miracles which Jesus wrought were such as they could neither overlook nor explain away. His humble origin, according to appearances, was undoubtedly an objection in their eyes to the idea of His being the Messiah, the Prince whom they expected. Yet the miracles had excited attention among all ranks of the community. Some had been fully convinced, and had confessed their belief more or less distinctly, more or less openly. "Many (in Jerusalem) believed in his name when they saw the miracles which he did." Nicodemus and some of his acquaintance thought that He must be at least a prophet, "a teacher come from God:" but, before committing himself publicly to any avowal of what was in his mind, he determined to visit the teacher under cover of night, and ascertain privately what

might be the precise nature of His claims and of His doctrine.

On his arrival, he admitted the impression which had been made upon himself and others by the undoubted miracles. Jesus did not answer him directly, "Ye judge rightly; I *am* come from God, and God *is* with me." He did not say as He did afterwards to another inquirer, "I that speak unto thee, am the Messiah." He began at once to call attention to "the kingdom of God," which He had come to reveal, and the principles of which He had come to establish,—His own kingdom, which was not of this world, not of earthly origin, nor to be consolidated by earthly means.

Now let us try to understand clearly, before we go further, what this kingdom is. From not rightly seeing this, many, I think, misapprehend the sense of the text, and are led away by divers delusions.

John the Baptist came preaching "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." For I am the forerunner spoken of by Esaias: my preaching is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." He that cometh—the Lord, whose herald I am—shall "baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." The kingdom of heaven is at hand! "Every valley shall be filled; and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth," *i. e.* all difficulties shall in due time be overcome, and all defects corrected. For the kingdom shall be universally established; "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God." The very next day, after John the Baptist made this announcement to the priests and Levites from Jerusalem, he seeth Jesus coming unto him and saith, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." This is He of whom I spake. For, after His baptism, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him." "I saw and bare record,"—for I heard the voice from heaven—"that this is the Son of God."

A new era now opens. "When Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee," and

"began to preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He took up the very words of the Baptist. "And Jesus went about all Galilee teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness." "And his fame went throughout all Syria." "And there followed him great multitudes of people."

Now the point is, what *was* "the Gospel of the kingdom"—of the kingdom of God—the kingdom of heaven, which John the Baptist heralded, and our Lord explained and inaugurated? For this is the kingdom which no man can see till he is born again, which no man can enter till he is born of water and of the Spirit. What was, what is, this kingdom? Is this kingdom of heaven a place, or is it a spiritual condition! That heaven is often spoken of in Scripture as a place, is of course not questioned. The question is, what the "kingdom of heaven" or "the kingdom of God" means in our Lord's conversation with Nicodemus, and in His parables, and elsewhere generally. When He says, in His Sermon on the Mount, to those who are reviled and persecuted and falsely accused, for His sake, "Rejoice and be exceeding glad, for great is your reward in heaven;" there, beyond a doubt, he speaks of heaven as a place. But is not the meaning different when He says, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand;" "the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field;" "whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter therein;" "I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities;" "behold, the kingdom of God is within you?" You will see that it is, that it must be, different. The local heaven is but one of several meanings conveyed by the expression, "Kingdom of heaven" or "Kingdom of God."

About the beginning of His ministry, after announcing that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, our Lord came to Nazareth, and went into the synagogue on the Sabbath, and read to the people from Isaiah's prophecy this passage, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because he hath annointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, and to preach

deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.". This was the Gospel of the kingdom. It was by doing these things that Christ was to unveil the kingdom of God, the reign of paternal love.

"And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness (all the people in this synagogue of Nazareth where he had been brought up) and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."

The loving words of His discourse on this occasion are not given by the Evangelist. But you see that Jesus applied to Himself the words of Isaiah's prophecy: "*This day* is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears." "The Spirit of the Lord hath anointed *me* to preach the gospel," *i. e.* I am the Messiah, the Anointed; and I am sent by "the Lord God and His Spirit" to proclaim the reign of love, to bring good news to the poor,—to heal those whose hearts are broken by trouble,—to preach liberty to the prisoners,* and looking-up to the blind. "Recovering of sight" gives the meaning no doubt: but it is not half so expressive as the original single word, which just means *looking-up*.

This one word, indeed, is a key to the sense of the phrase, "Kingdom of God." For, though Christ gave literal sight to many who were literally blind, the spiritual meaning is the principal meaning. He came to enable the spiritually blind to *look-up*,—to recognize the hand of God in everything He has made,—to recognize the love of a Father in everything He does or has done,—to recognize a glorious purpose in all His dispensations,—and to perceive the privilege, the blessedness, of falling in with His purpose, submitting to His will, and rejoicing in His reign. "The Lord reigneth; let the earth be glad." "God is love." The kingdom of love

* "He went and preached unto the spirits in prison."—1 Pet. iii. 19.

is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is the reign of God, the reign of infinite love, here and everywhere,—on this round world, and in all the worlds that crowd the universe,—on earth and in heaven,—among men and angels. Christ was the Teacher sent from God to teach mankind that the kingdom of God is the kingdom of our Father,—that the reign of God is the reign of love, as well as of holiness, of justice, and of truth,—that God is not willing that any should perish,—and that He proved this to mankind by sending His Son into the world, "that the world through him might be saved," and by "delivering him up for us all," that "with him he might freely give us (his disciples) all things;" making us "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ."

What words are these? What language is this? Sinners of Adam's race "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!" Oh, wonderful! most wonderful! What love must that be which has made this possible! nay, not only possible, but a reality already to multitudes of humble souls, many of them—probably a very large proportion—obscure, poor, despised, persecuted, down-trodden, broken-hearted in this world! and how did it come about? How were those multitudes thus exalted, transformed, glorified? By believing in the Son of God. This belief in Christ and His teaching, ushered their souls into a new world. It was like being born again. They came into a new state of existence. They began to see the kingdom of God. And seeing it to be what it was, and is, and always must be, the kingdom of love and righteousness, and peace and joy, they entered as willing subjects:—they began to look to God as their King,—to follow Christ as their Divine Master and Model,—to submit their will to His will, and to love all whom He loved, and specially those who love Him. And this, mark you, not after they were dead, but while they were alive upon earth, ploughing and weaving, and marching and sailing, and buying and selling, and reading and writing. They believed in Christ; they were born again; they saw the kingdom of God, and they entered it. And afterwards—perhaps long, long

afterwards—they entered into the local heaven, wherever it may be, whither our Saviour Christ, at the right hand of God exalted in our human nature, hath gone before.

The kingdom of God extends to all localities, and includes all created intelligences, whether the intelligences perceive it or not,—whether they submit to it or not.

Our idea of God is apt to be only an extension of our idea of a very great earthly king. We think of Him as governing suns and starry systems, and a boundless variety of them, as an earthly monarch rules his little domain, a kingdom external to himself. He is a mere person governing other persons, who are, in many important respects, independent of his authority and beyond his control. But God is not such a monarch, however much we may enlarge the idea, "In him we live and move and have our being." Therefore, when our Saviour speaks of our entering the kingdom of God, this form of speech does not imply—is not intended to imply—that we ever can be out of it, in the largest sense. The meaning in the text of seeing the kingdom of God, is perceiving our true relations to God as our King and our Father, to whom we have been redeemed and reconciled by His only-begotten Son. And the meaning of entering the kingdom of God, is simply that we begin to act upon this knowledge of our relationship to Him, as His subjects, and as His redeemed and reconciled children. Our Lord taught Nicodemus, and now teaches us, this very truth, that when a man (an adult person, for He is not referring to infants) perceives these relations, he sees the kingdom of God, and is thus, in a manner, "born again," because he has passed from darkness to light, and into a new state of spiritual consciousness; and that when he begins to live in conformity with these relations to his heavenly Father and rightful Sovereign, endeavouring to obey all known commands, he enters upon the privileges, the work, and the enjoyments of the kingdom of God, which never could be unless he were "led by the Spirit of God." For the water is a symbol, and the real blessing is the spiritual cleans-

ing which the symbol represents cleansing, from the guilt and power of sin. The symbol is to be used, because our Lord appointed it. It is not to be despised, because only a symbol. Surely the Almighty who created the water, and our bodies and souls and everything else, can accompany or follow His own symbol with the blessing which He intends it to represent. Baptism declares the efficacy of Christ's atonement. The water represents "the blood of sprinkling." When the Israelites were being redeemed from Egypt, they were commanded to sprinkle the blood of the Paschal lamb on the two side-posts and on the upper door-post of their houses. Their doing so was an act of faith and obedience. In every house thus sprinkled, the first-born was as safe as the rest of the family. The sprinkling with blood was analogous to our baptizing with water; for the water means nothing less than the blood of Christ, our Paschal Lamb, "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." The Passover rites prefigured both the sacraments. Sprinkling the door-posts with the blood of the sacrifice, and afterwards feasting on the sacrifice itself, vividly represented baptism and the Lord's Supper. (Here hundreds of curious questions have been started, which for the present may be passed by; and many of them are unworthy of notice at any time.) There is the outward and visible sign; and there is the inward and spiritual grace. If the outward and visible sign is Christ's own ordinance, why should any one doubt that the grace intended follows, according to our increasing capacity and willingness to receive? And, as a matter of fact, is there one among us who has not been conscious of the inward influences of the Spirit of God, leading us to trust in the efficacy of the atoning blood, and to avail ourselves of all the blessings of redemption? Is there any one among us who, having yielded his whole soul to these influences, is not led, guided, blessed by them? Now, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God;" *i. e.* they have been "born of God," "born of the Spirit." They have perceived their true relations to God, as subjects of His kingdom, and

children of His family; and they have entered upon the enjoyment of their blood-bought privileges; which just means that they have entered into the kingdom of God. For "the kingdom of God" is not anything outward merely, "but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." He who has entered upon a life of righteousness, and peace and God-given joy, has entered into the kingdom of God. Death, to him, will be only transition,—translation from an outlying province abounding with enemies, to the splendours of the metropolis, and the undisturbed security of our Father's house,—that house of many mansions, compared with which our brightest conceptions are poor and mean.

The question for you and me is this:—Am I led by the Spirit of God? If so, I am one of the sons of God,—born of the Spirit. I need not be disturbed by speculations, ancient or modern, orthodox or heterodox. I have already seen the kingdom of God, and entered into it.

XXVI.

THE NEW NATURE.

"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."—*St. Matthew* xxii. 37–40.

In, other words, this love to God and man is the very essence of true religion. In proportion as this love has been developed in our character, we have made progress in the Divine life. If this love has not yet begun to rule us, we know nothing of Christianity by personal experience; our religion is all hearsay and speculation. If this love has begun to govern our conduct, then, though we may be conscious of numberless errors and infirmities of purpose, plan, and execution, we have begun to see the kingdom of God,—the blessedness of being reconciled to Him whose will has ever been and ever must be the law of the universe. Is it not, then, our plain duty to examine ourselves, to call ourselves to account, to look earnestly into our actual condition before God, and our prospects as immortal creatures already on the confines of another world,—a new state of existence, into which multitudes are entering every day?

The idea of loving God with all our heart seems to the many too abstract to be practical. They conclude that it must be a form of enthusiasm, which is with them another word for delusion. Yet, if anything is certain, this is certain,—that human nature has been constructed

by its Author for the express purpose of being governed by love, and thus showing forth the glory of God. Human nature is so constituted that it never can rest in anything else. Perhaps no writer ever explained the principles of human nature, in a manner strictly philosophical, so clearly as Bishop Butler. After the closest inquiry, this is the conclusion at which he arrives:—The mind and heart of man are so constructed that they cannot rest till they have found their true centre of attraction. Our faculties and affections can have no long-continued or real satisfaction till they are consciously regulated by the Divine principle of love—love to God and love to man.

And, to those acquainted with Christianity, the love of God need not seem to be so abstract as to those who have had no such revelation. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. Christ is perfect man as well as perfect God. In Him Deity has come down to us, has come nearer to our powers of apprehension,—has come within the circle of our affections as a distinct Person, manifesting in actual life and visible conduct, here upon this earth, the perfections of the Infinite, whom no man hath seen, nor can see. To love Christ is to love God; to honour the Son is to honour the Father; to be united to the Son is to be united in Him to the Father. This is happiness. Without this, happiness is impossible. God has so made us that we must rest in Him, or be for ever in a state of unrest, which is the source of all sin and misery. Instead of attempting to show this by detailed argument,—a thing that has been done repeatedly and irrefragably by reasoners of the highest power,—I simply appeal to your experience, to the evidence of your consciousness. Those among you who have begun to love God supremely and your neighbour sincerely have found rest and peace in this new relationship. Those of you who love the world supremely, who live without reference to the revealed will of God in Christ, have not found rest or peace anywhere down to the present hour. If your experience does not agree with what I now say, I have no claim upon your attention. But if your experience

confirms what I say,—as I am confident it does, for as face answereth to face, so does the heart of one man to the heart of another,—then I do claim your attention, and the truth which I am affirming gives me a right to call upon you to consider your ways, to examine your life, to review your conduct, to repent of what you know to be wrong, and resolve, in God's strength, to do in the future what you know to be right,—that is, to submit yourself wholly to God, and to show that you love Him by keeping His commandments.

But you object. "How can it be said that human nature has been constituted on purpose to love and obey God, and thus be in harmony with His will, since even an Apostle confesses that when he would do good, evil was present with him, and that he could not always do the good which the law of his mind required him to do?"

I answer, the Christian religion recognizes this state of things, and not only explains it (which no other religion has ever done), but provides a remedy for it,—in fact the only remedy. The two leading thoughts that run through the Bible are sin and redemption,—the effects of sin and the necessity of redemption. Sin has produced a disturbance and confusion in human nature,—a rebellious spirit and downward tendencies. But it has not changed the faculties or affections or general constitution of the nature originally given us. The evil consists in this, that they have been set upon wrong objects, and this itself produces anarchy and misery. If we submit ourselves to Christ, He gives us the Holy Spirit to restore order. This is a gradual work. It was gradual even in the Apostles. No faculty is changed by the influence of the Holy Spirit. No affection is taken out of our nature, no appetite, no passion, no part of the original constitution; but the whole is put under government, as it was at the beginning. Under what government? The government of conscience,—that is, the government of God. This is to enter into the kingdom of God,—to submit to His kingly authority, speaking to us through our conscience. This is to be born again of the Spirit; this is conversion from sin to God.

Much that is misleading has been written and spoken on this all-important subject. Individuals have set forth their own experience, as a sort of pattern experience, with which they encourage others to compare theirs. This is done, no doubt, with the best intentions; but that does not prevent the mischief which results. The truth is, that God deals differently with every human soul as to particular details. The principles are always the same; the details never. Some live conscientiously from childhood, and the love of God and man goes on developing in their hearts, by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, as they grow older. They have fallen into many sins of thought and word and deed; but, because they loved God and trusted in Christ, their sins have always grieved and distressed them on reflection, and they hasten back to the only refuge,—God's love and mercy. Such persons cannot tell when they were first converted to God. Their minds were influenced by early teaching blessed by the Holy Spirit, in answer often to the fervent prayers of pious parents. Every time one who has been enticed by sin and drawn aside from the narrow way comes back into the right way, he is turned or converted to God. But we generally speak of conversion with reference to the first turning, and the date of that blessed event many a sincere Christian cannot tell.

But by far the greater number of those who are converted to God have grown up in allowed sin,—yielding themselves to its power in various ways,—very respectable, it may be, in the eyes of their neighbours as to outward things, but still with thoroughly wicked hearts and ungoverned passions and tempers,—hearts full of envy, covetousness, malice, pride, and mouths full of all uncharitableness. When such persons begin to live as in the sight of God, *i.e.* to live conscientiously, to scrutinize their own thoughts, and call themselves to account strictly,—and all this because love to Christ has taken possession of their hearts,—such a change cannot happen without their knowing it. It may take place so gradually, being extended perhaps over a series of years, that they cannot point to a particular day on which they can say that

they were converted. But they know very well that at one time they neglected prayer, and took no pleasure in the Word of God, whereas now, in all their troubles, trials, and anxieties, they hasten instinctively to tell their Divine Master, sure that His ear is ever open; and they find that their happiest moments are those in which Christ shines into their hearts through His own recorded words or those of His inspired servants. One who is conscious of such a change as this need not give himself any concern as to the date of his conversion. The fact is certain. He is living as a willing and loyal and loving subject under the government of God,—that is, in the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom of heaven; and the chief joy of his heart consists in the sure prospect of abiding in this blessed relationship for ever,—growing in holiness, loving more ardently and serving more faithfully that glorious Redeemer through whom all spiritual benefits have accrued to him.

Except ye be converted in this sense, and become as little children in humility and love and trustfulness, ye cannot enter into the kingdom of God. I now press this upon your attention. I implore you not to treat the subject lightly or carelessly,—not to put such thoughts away from you. If you have not yet turned to God, resolve by His grace to turn now, and to continue to come back to Him as often as your enemies from within and from without lead you astray. In no other way can you answer the end for which you were created. In no other way can you find rest for that mysterious nature which God has given you. In no other way can you be happy. Wisdom's ways you will find to be ways of pleasantness now and for ever, and all her paths peace. And wisdom's ways are Christ's ways. And the whole is reducible to this short formula,—supreme love to God and sincere love to man. We shall love our neighbours the more in proportion as they are Christlike, but we shall love all sincerely with the love of hearty good will. What a change there would be in all the aspects of human society if men walked in the light of this revelation of the Divine character and claims! God speed the day!

XXVII.

THE LIGHT AND THE DARKNESS.

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."—*St. John* xii. 46.

In some of the great coal-mines of England, far down under the surface of the earth, thousands of children have been born, and many have there spent their early years, without seeing the sun or feeling the sunshine. Imagine one of those children of darkness, when he became old enough to ask questions, listening to descriptions of the upper world, where the sun shines on green fields and smiling rivers, on spacious houses and beautiful gardens, on mountains and lakes and valleys and seas and great cities and crowded harbours. The mother, who had seen all these, might describe them ever so correctly, and enter into details ever so minute, yet how confused must be the notions of them in the mind of the inquirer! Looking up through the shaft by which the coals are conveyed to the surface, he has seen the only glimmering of daylight that ever entered his eyes. It seemed little more than a point at the end of a tunnel,—not so bright to him as the light from a miner's lamp. Christ says, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." This implies that we are in spiritual darkness until we see this light and come to it, and that, unless we believe on Him, we must *abide* in darkness. If you had as much faith in the Gospel as the miner's child would naturally have in his mother's account of

the upper world covered with sunshine, how earnestly you would desire to ascend to this higher level, to see with your own eyes, and enjoy in your own person, the privileges described by those who have in some degree experienced them! You would not rest satisfied with merely hearing of them. You would resolve (would you not?) at the first opportunity to test the truth by experience. But "this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil,"—*i.e.* because they do not really believe in the blessings of the light, and in the joy of being delivered from the bondage of darkness and of evil. They listen to the Gospel, as to a wonderful story or a pleasant song, to pass the time on a Sunday; but the story or the song has, perhaps, no more influence upon their conduct than the wind has on a bit of granite, or the sunshine on a stratum of coal.

It may be that this is almost true of some of us. Now, you know well that thousands and tens of thousands who scorned a lie have declared that they were lifted up out of the darkness into the marvellous light, and have declared that they were thus ushered into the felt blessedness of a new life, and that they have been filled with such peace and joy in the sunshine of God's favour that nothing could express it so well as some of the grandest of the Hebrew Psalms, or some of the psalm-like utterances of Paul and Peter and John, when their hearts were flooded with a consciousness of the love of God in Christ. You know well that you have every conceivable reason for believing that the testimony of the Apostles is true,—that the testimony of those who, during all the ages, have followed in their shining footsteps is also true,—nay, that there are great numbers of persons now living, whom in your inmost thoughts you cannot but respect and esteem, who bear the same testimony, in the face of infidel wit and profane scoffs, and who would sooner suffer the loss of all things than deny the faith which has transformed and blessed them. Knowing this as you do, are you content to remain in the darkness from which all these declare that they have

been delivered? delivered by the power of God giving efficacy to prescribed means, and working silently through the natural faculties,—delivered in a degree so measurable by results that they would as soon doubt their own existence as the reality of the deliverance? Are you unwilling to be delivered because you prefer to remain under the power of evil for the sake of what you regard as its pleasures? These pleasures would change their aspect if you had for a moment light enough to see them as they really are. But this you do not believe. Inclination has compendious ways of answering, or at least silencing, every argument in favour of a heavenly and beautiful life which the Holy Ghost presses upon you through your conscience. Thus you abide in darkness, you go on in sin, your path is downward, downward into deeper darkness; the very demons who tempt you are doubtless amazed at your madness; every step of your career is illustrating and enforcing the warnings of Christ,—and if you continue thus for a few days longer —(how many days do you expect to live?—reduce the years to days and look into the securities)—your destination is plainly predicted and absolutely inevitable,—a place of weeping and wailing among those who are shut out from "the marriage-supper of the Lamb."

And does not this terrify you? No; not much. If it did, you could not go on; which proves that it does not terrify you; which proves that you reject the words of Christ; which proves that you are in a worse position before God than if you had been brought up among worshippers of stocks and stones. "But this," you say, "is not the sort of doctrine you like. You are not to be frightened into seriousness. You do not care to be told that you are in a worse position than heathen idolaters. The very fact that you attend public worship ought, you think, to count for something. Besides, you have always been in the habit of reading a passage of Scripture from time to time; and you seldom sleep without saying your prayers."

Let all that count for what it is worth. But I am here to do my best to prevent you from being deceived.

That, you will admit, is an important part of my duty. May I ask you some questions?

Are you thoroughly in earnest when you read the Bible? and when you pray, do you believe in your heart that God is answering your prayers?

"What do I mean by being thoroughly in earnest when reading?" I will tell you.

Suppose that a man of great wealth had left you certain legacies, and that you had this day received a copy of the will, which you find to be a document of great length, containing many bequests of many different kinds of property, and specifying certain conditions to be fulfilled by the heirs. The state of your mind when reading that will is what I mean by being thoroughly in earnest. Is that the way in which you read the Bible? Is that the state of your mind, or is it anything like the state of your mind, when you study the recorded words of Christ Himself? If it is, thanks be to God!

"And what do I mean by being thoroughly in earnest when you pray?" Suppose that you had been accused of high treason, and found guilty, and condemned to die. The case appears to be utterly hopeless. You have not even been recommended to mercy. Death stares you in the face. You have but a few hours to live. Your friends come to take leave of you. At this terrible crisis, when the last ray of hope has faded from your horizon, you hear the sound of trumpets. The son of the sovereign has come to visit the prison. As he passes, the door of your cell is thrown open and you cast yourself at his feet, begging your life, praying for pardon. You dare not look up, but you will not let him go, and he does not spurn you. There is an interval of silence. The state of your mind while you are waiting for his answer explains what I mean by earnestness in prayer.

Such intense earnestness, it is true,—such an agony of earnestness,—must be exceptional, and limited as to time. It is thus that a man prays when he sees vividly for the first time the utter hopelessness of his condition, as a condemned sinner, if he were without an advocate.

But all his life long the prayers of a sincere Christian will be so far earnest that he will always expect an answer, and wait for it, and keep looking for it. This will be the steady habit of his mind, as a petitioner at the throne of grace. He is not going through a mere form; he is not speaking into the empty air; he is not addressing a deaf god or a sleeping god; he is not bending his knees before a marble Baal, or a painted Jupiter, or a traditional myth existing only in imagination. He is speaking into the listening ear of the only living and true God, who, by His Son, said, "Ask and it shall be given you;" "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good things to them that ask him?" Can you conceive any form of words more encouraging to sinners who feel their need of what God alone can bestow? And then consider Whose words they are.

If you earnestly avail yourself of this encouragement, if you know and are sure that God for Christ's sake does hear and answer your prayers, then I need not ask how you read your Bible. You will read it as the most precious Book in the world. You will read it as a Book that touches your dearest personal interests more closely than any other that ever was, or could be written. You will read it as the only record containing the divine Will and Testament of the Son of God, confirming to you a personal, present, and everlasting interest in His "unsearchable riches," and thus opening up to you the most glorious prospect that ever filled and astonished the human mind, or delighted the human heart.

Yes; if you are in communication with God by prayer, it will be your daily delight to search His word for the treasures which are there *hidden*, and some of which you have already found. And, believe me, there is no person on earth, however exalted his rank, however ample his fortune, whose condition is so much to be envied, as that of the humble Christian, whose happiness it is, by God's grace, to keep this communication always open; who enjoys what may truly be called personal interviews with Jesus Christ from day to day; and who esteems the

privilege above—infinitely above—the praise of genius, the pride of empire, and the wealth of worlds.

Then who will stay down in the darkness, when all are invited—when all are welcome to come up into the light? "I am come," saith Christ, "a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness." "He that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth." "Believe in the light that ye may be the children of light." We all know what it is to walk in darkness—spiritual darkness—not seeing our way, not knowing whither we go. And some know what it is to rise out of the darkness, and walk in the light, as the children of light and of the day, rejoicing in the Lord, living as in His presence, and blessed with daily communications of His love and grace. These have experienced the contrast between the two conditions; and they are grieved for their brethren who will not come up. They know what these brethren are risking, and what they are losing. They cannot help thinking of this very often. Believing husbands are in anxiety for unbelieving wives; believing wives for unbelieving husbands; believing parents for unbelieving children; believing children for unbelieving parents. Yet, if I mistake not, there is generally so much reserve on this greatest of all subjects, and so little concern is shown by those who do really believe, that the unbelieving are very apt to think the matter, after all, not much more than a speculation. Surely this is not a right state of things. Surely we compromise the truth, when it is possible for such misapprehensions to exist around us. Surely our example is very defective, when any one intimately acquainted with us can imagine that our faith in Christ makes but little difference between us and those who are without it. We cannot "abide in darkness," if we truly believe in Christ: but the measure of *light* we have, will be in proportion to the measure of *faith* we have. Let us examine ourselves, therefore. If we do not let our light shine, it is because there is but little light in us; if there is but little light in us, it is because we have but little faith; if we have but little faith, it is

because we do not act up to what we have, and because there is no thorough heart-earnestness in our petitions for more. So that this half-dead condition of any of us, is not our misfortune but our fault. Let us not deceive ourselves on this point. (I speak to those who profess to "love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.") It is not that God has forgotten you; it is not that His promises have failed in the smallest particular; it is not that your will is fettered by any decree, or by the circumstances in which Providence has placed you: but it is, that you do not use the means, as God intends and expects and commands you to use them: it is that you have been tampering with evil, wandering at least on the outskirts of actual sin, and thus inhaling a poisonous atmosphere. It is this that makes you spiritually cold and feeble, and useless and joyless. If you heartily seek, you shall find. If you make God's word your study, in order to hold communion with Him, He will make it your delight: for there you will find that God really comes to meet you; there you will find clear answers to many of your prayers; and there you will find food for your soul's nourishment and living springs for your soul's refreshment. Christ has come a light into the world: there can be no excuse, no apology for any one of us who abides in darkness. Then will you come to Christ? Will you come to-day? The light of His countenance—the sunshine of His favour is blessedness. Be your sins what they may, come at once. He will welcome you. He will bless you.

XXVIII.

HOW CAN YE BELIEVE?

"How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?"—*St. John* v. 44.

THUS it ever has been,—thus it is now,—thus it will always continue to be, throughout the dispensation. So long as men prefer human honour to that which is divine,—so long as they prefer earthly honour to that which is heavenly,—so long as the present occupies the whole field of their vision, and the rising grandeur of the future is shut out from their contemplation, they cannot believe the Gospel of Christ, which offers no honours but those which are heavenly and divine. They will not come to Christ, that they may have life; because the life which He brings, and the glory which is its consequence, are altogether outside the sphere of their sympathies and their desires. Their cravings are after other things,—things of a different nature, of a different order, inferior in kind, inferior in dignity,—the advantages and ornaments of worldly success, wealth, titles, power, position,—whatever ministers to sense and covetousness and pride. God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble. The honours which Christ bestows are for the meek and lowly in heart,—those who have no great opinion of themselves or their deservings,—no thought of exulting over their less prosperous neighbours,—no thought of envying those who seem to be more prosperous. But what do we see and hear around

us in the world? Hungry selfishness going about like the enemy of mankind, seeking what it may devour, and never satisfied; envyings, murmurings, jealousies, hatred, evil speaking, backbiting, and ill-concealed rejoicing in other people's errors and misfortunes.

Where these tempers are habitually cherished and indulged, there can be no real faith in Christ or the future to which He points us. His glory He bestows upon His followers, according to their capacity to receive; but that glory is the unfolding of love and truth and purity, and endless delight in infinite forms of goodness. If men will cleave to the dust, not through lamented infirmity, but by choice; if they will be nothing higher or nobler than creeping things of the earth, how can they be attracted by the glory of Christ, or by the sure prospect of becoming partakers of that glory? Yet the glory of Christ, and the promise to believers that they shall be joint-heirs with Him and partakers of His glory; this is the highest strain of the great Gospel anthem, which has been sounding down through the ages, and is now audible here amid the barren wastes of heathendom. Leave that out, and the Gospel becomes—what?—One of a variety of moral philosophies. But Christ says, "All things that the Father hath are mine:"—"All power is given unto me in heaven and on earth:"—"As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you:"—"The Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me:"—"Neither pray I for these alone (the Apostles), but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou hast given me, I have given them." I beg your solemn attention to these words from the lips of the Son of God. Speaking of all, who from that time forward, through all the ages, should believe on Him through the word of the Apostles, He says, "The glory which thou hast given me, I have given them: that they may be one, even as we are one,—I in them, and thou in me, that

they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

Now, if any one prefers the honour that cometh from men,—the favour of the great ones of the earth, whose greatness is vanishing while we speak of it,—the applause of the multitude, unstable as water, flowing and ebbing like the tides,—to the honour which Christ secures for ever,—absolutely for ever,—to the very weakest of His sincere disciples, it is no wonder that the Gospel is a dead letter to such an one. Yet let me not speak as if such an one were rarely to be met with in Christian Churches. Christian communities are nearly made up of such; the churches contain crowds of them. You know that it is so. Those who in their hearts prefer the glory of being united to Christ are the exceptions. And does this prove nothing? Does not this confirm and illustrate the statements of our Lord and His Apostles? Does not this prove blindness in the spiritual nature? Can any infatuation be thought of which will bear comparison with this? Oh, how true it is, that "the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not!" The promises of God to all who love and follow the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, are entirely eclipsed (it so appears to the many) by some temporal inheritance, or appointment, or designation, or even (for we must come down very low to meet the facts of the case) by the poor passing satisfaction of being admired for one's equipage, for one's personal appearance, or for one's dress! Most humiliating it is to admit this,—to think this can be true,—*is* true of myriads upon myriads of intelligent beings, created in the image of God! even of persons brought up in Christian homes, and more or less educated. When you think of this in your hours of retirement and meditation, you cannot but wonder; and if you are obliged, before your conscience, to allow that you yourself are thus infatuated, thus blind to your true and lasting interests, are you not anxious that you might be able to see the world and its passing show with different eyes, and your pro-

spects for the everlasting future in something more like their reality? Do you, then, inquire how this may be? The answer is not far off, or difficult of apprehension. In truth, it is partly because you think it simple and commonplace, that you give it so little of your attention. Read earnestly, pray earnestly, work earnestly. That is the answer. The words of Christ and His prophets and Apostles have life in them,—divine life, to quicken your deadness, and clear your eye-sight. The effect of being instant in prayer is plainly declared by the Son of God. God does hear, God does answer, if you devote yourself wholly to Him. He will not be mocked by prayers which have no heart in them. But if you are truly in earnest,—if you are searching the Word as for gold and silver,—if you are praying for what you believe to be the greatest, the most excellent, the most desirable of all blessings,—if God, who sees your heart, knows that you mean what you say; then there is no law in the universe of more uniform operation than that by which blessings will descend into your soul, blessings of which at present you have but a dim conception. Christ begins to communicate to you His own glory as the Son of Man. He makes you vividly conscious of His love to you; He makes you earnestly desirous to show your love to Him. And you will find a hundred ways of showing it. And yet you will never think that you have been able to show a thousandth part of what you desire to feel toward your Divine benefactor, who allows you to regard Him as your dearest and most intimate friend. You will feel that you are born into a new kingdom; which Christ speaks of as "the kingdom of God" and "the kingdom of heaven." Old things will pass away, in a manner that will surprise you,—old attachments which were unworthy,—old plans on which once you set your heart. You will cease to seek, or admire, or care for, many things which once appeared to be of the essence of happiness.

This will be the natural and certain effect of a change in your point of view. And now many things which you formerly thought uninteresting and dull and bur-

densome will become a delight; for example, meditation on the words of Christ and the inspired men whose teaching has come down to us. Is there one among us who does not remember when that was a weariness and a burden? Are there not very many to whom it is a weariness and a burden now? All that will become quite otherwise, if you will follow the simple directions of the Lord Jesus Christ, believing what He says, and acting accordingly. We challenge you to the experiment. We hesitate not to stake the truth of Christianity on the certainty of success. And this, be assured, is not the rash talk of an enthusiast. It is but an echo of what has been said by many of the greatest and best men who have ever appeared in the world,—many of the brightest lights of the last eighteen centuries. They invite you to experiment of the truth of Christ's religion, as more profitable than argument,—more convincing than the most conclusive reasonings. But of their testimony you are well aware. I am only reminding you of what you already know. Why, then, is there one among us who will not make the experiment on which true happiness for all your future depends? Why? The reasons are various; and they are different in different minds; and it requires a deep knowledge of human nature to trace and describe the differences. But they are all included under one head,—evil inclination,—an inherent tendency, and a very strong tendency,—to prefer what is wrong to what is right,—what is foolish to what is wise. And if any one fancies that he is free from this tendency, that only shows how much need he has to examine himself. I believe that many who do not profess to be Christians in more than the name will bear me out in this,—will assent to what I say, because they know enough of themselves to put this truth beyond a question. But again, to the law and to the testimony! The remedy is the Word of God and prayer. You must work at first contrary to inclination, looking to God for help,—the help which He promises. Ask for faith,—seek it in the study of the Word,—endeavour to trust wholly to the declarations of Him

who made you for Himself, and redeemed you by atonement. Remember that God-appointed means, rightly used, cannot fail. Say not, like Naaman the Syrian, "Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in *them* and be clean?" May I not wash in French philosophy or German philosophy and be clean? May I not atone by my good works, without reference to Jesus Christ? Alas! this is folly of the deepest dye. If the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldst thou not have done it? How much more, when He saith unto thee, wash, and be clean!

There is but one fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness. Wash in that. Change your mind as Naaman did, and as Naaman was cleansed from the leprosy of his body, so shall you be from the leprosy of your soul. "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" because such a belief is the cause of a revolution in your nature, and in your relations to God. Seek the honour which cometh from God, and you will set lightly by that which cometh from men. And if you seek true and lasting honour, seek it where it is to be found. Seek it in humility,—with prayer,—with earnestness in some degree suitable. Consider how marvellous it is that men can be so indifferent on a subject like this. To be in Christ is to be united to Him from whom all true and lasting honour proceeds. Then give your soul no rest, till you find rest in Him. If you take Him at His word, you will be happy and honoured and glorious for ever. When all earthly distinctions shall have faded and been forgotten, you will be with Him, near Him, like Him, rejoicing in your relationship as an heir of God and one of the brethren of Christ, and ever on the wing to do good service. These will be your "pleasures for evermore."

XXIX.

NOT SERVANTS BUT FRIENDS.

"Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."—*St. John* xv. 15.

UNDER the Mosaic dispensation the chosen people were in the condition of servants. They groaned under a heavy yoke—the yoke of the ceremonial law. Under the Christian dispensation we are freed from this burden. Our liberty under Christ is a glorious liberty, and may well be contrasted with the bondage of Judaism, as well as with the bondage of sin. "Henceforth," says our Lord to His disciples, "I call you not servants; . . . but I have called you [begun to call you] friends." "I have given you the seeds or principles of many truths which were hidden from your fathers in the ages that are past. These will now gradually unfold, and grow, and bear fruit in your minds and hearts, under the influence of the Holy Ghost. Through me ye shall henceforth have nearer access unto God and a more intimate knowledge of His purposes and methods than His most honoured servants have hitherto been favoured with."

Jesus gives the reason for calling His disciples no longer servants, but friends. "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth." A faithful servant obeys the command of his master, whether he understands the reason why it is issued or not. He may have no idea of the object in view, but still he feels bound to comply. Such was the position of the Jews under the old economy. They were

obliged to comply with the requirements of a ritual system, of the meaning of which most of them could understand but little. They recognized the binding authority of the ceremonial law, and obeyed its injunctions by performing certain outward rites; but of the great principles of the divine government shadowed forth in these rites they knew almost nothing. Thus they had been in the position of servants, obeying without comprehending. Henceforth, however, the position of believers was to be a different and far nobler one. They were no longer to yield a blind obedience, "for," says Christ, "all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you." The knowledge of principles which our Lord had communicated and was still further to communicate to them, put them on a new and much higher footing, elevated them to the rank of friends.

When Christ says that He had made known to His disciples *all* that He had heard of His Father, we take the meaning to be that He had made known to them all that He had been commissioned by the Father to reveal, as far as they were able to bear it. Among other things He had opened up to them a clearer view of the divine character than had previously been given. God had not hitherto been generally known as the loving Father of mankind. The parable of the Prodigal Son, for example, was a new revelation. The law was given by Moses; but the grace and the truth, shadowed forth in the law, came by Jesus Christ.

The New Testament abounds with distinct statements of the way of salvation through Christ, of whom the ancient sacrifices were merely types. This distinctness of the New-Testament revelation gives all Christians a great advantage over those who lived under the old economies. Christ has revealed to His friends a variety of truths which He formerly concealed from His servants.

"But is it not said of Enoch that he 'walked with God'? Is it not said of Abraham that he was 'the friend of God'? Is it not said of David that he was 'a man after God's own heart'? And were not many of the ancient patriarchs and prophets accustomed to live in

close intercourse with God? Were they not honoured with unquestionable marks of God's friendship?"

All this is true; and yet our Lord Himself, in the most marked manner, contrasts their privileges with those of believers under the Christian dispensation.

Surely, then, such a view of our position ought to excite our warmest gratitude. That Christ should call any sinners of the human race His friends is wonderful. Who will deny that this is good news? If we are true disciples, we are the friends of Christ; and by calling us His friends He declares to us that *He* is *our* friend. So, then, the revelation in the Gospel is a loving communication made by our best Friend—a Friend who is now pleading for us at the right-hand of God in Heaven,—a Friend to whom all power in Heaven and on earth has been committed. Shall we not value His Gospel? There He makes known to us the will of His Father and our Father. There He gives us the strongest proofs of His amazing love. There He opens to us the treasures of wisdom and of grace. There He vouchsafes us a glimpse even of the holy of holies, into which He Himself hath entered for us beyond the veil; and there He reveals to us how we are to follow Him to that heavenly rest. Let us try to realize the inestimable, priceless value of this glorious Gospel of the Son of God, for surely it is "more to be desired than gold, yea, than much fine gold."

And (most astonishing of all) this Gospel, in the first place, is a loving proclamation from God to His enemies. "God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." Shall we not love and obey the Author of our salvation? What are we? Our claims? Are we not rebels? and have we not aggravated our rebellion by every circumstance that could make it more offensive? Yet, notwithstanding all, if we accept the Gospel, if we trust in Christ and follow Him, He calls us His friends. What can be more wonderful? Shall we not earnestly search the records which contain information so infinitely important to us? Shall we not make ourselves familiar

with every part of the holy book in which this blessed Gospel is published? Ought anything to be allowed for long to distract our attention from the subject?

Yet I believe that, even among Protestants, the Bible is very little read; and that, of those who do read it, the many are attracted by the letter, the form, the uniqueness, and manifold beauty of style and expression, or by the weapons which it supplies to the polemic. Antiquarians find it interesting; literary men find it interesting; controversialists find it interesting; but how few examine it feeling that they are "wretched and miserable, and poor and blind, and naked," and eager to find out how they may be the friends of Christ, the friends of God!

Is it not astonishing that, while we know life to be so short, our time on earth so uncertain, every instant so precious, conversions so rare, sudden death so frequent, and eternity so awful to those who die in their sins, so many delay accepting the Gospel, or even making the necessary inquiry concerning its truth and value? One should suppose that salvation might be secured at any moment, or that our life must be in our own hands, or that abundant time for repentance had been guaranteed, or that we thought it no great misfortune to die unforgiven, so generally do sinners lull themselves to sleep, in the vague hope of some day changing their course and becoming Christians. Yet they generally admit that they need to be changed, that they ought to be very different from what they are, and that there can be no more dreadful prospect than that of dying under condemnation. Still, notwithstanding these ready admissions, they go on neglecting, as if it were of no consequence, what they know to be unspeakably important; and the pretexts on which they excuse their indifference are so frivolous, so childish, so foolish, that they will not bear examination for an instant. How can such persons feel at ease? They are in open rebellion, as Christ's enemies. He offers to make them His friends, yet they turn a deaf ear to this Gospel.

Even of those who respect the ordinances of religion the majority content themselves with outward acts and

observances. Am I really one of Christ's friends? Or am I still staggering under the yoke of a worn-out ritualism, doting upon ceremonies, looking to ordinances without realizing their significance, thinking and talking so much about what clergy can do, that Jesus Christ is kept in the back-ground and almost out of sight? Is Christ all and in all to me, the Rock on which I build, the Rock in which I hide, the Rock from which the living waters are ever flowing that quench my thirst? Or am I resting in some burlesque of Christianity? Many things are popular now which ere long will be seen to be utterly worthless, mere wood, hay, and stubble, which shall either rot or be burnt up. Satan has worked out many of his most successful schemes under the cloak of religion, and his instruments are in general themselves deceived. Even when it was the fashion to torture heretics on the rack and burn them at the stake, the agents who perpetrated those atrocities were perhaps as often self-deceivers as hypocrites. And the watchful enemy still deludes multitudes through the instrumentality of well-meaning men who work blindfolded. The net he throws over them is a veil, covered so richly with works of art, which allure and fascinate, that they can discern almost nothing beyond. Around such veiled prophets there is an air of mystery which attracts the crowd. But are they the friends of Christ? Are they even His servants? God knoweth. Each case, however perplexed, however impenetrable to mortal scrutiny, is fully before Him. We are not the judges. The servant of Christ may be made for a time the agent of Satan. Let us look to ourselves. There are weak points in the armour of every one of us. "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

XXX.

RECEIVED AS SONS AND DAUGHTERS.

"I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."—2 *Cor.* vi. 17, 18.

"THE Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king: he will save us." This is as true to us as it was to the Jews. Yet there is a prior relationship, nearer and more tender. The Lord is our Father, and we are all "His offspring." "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us?" But "a son honoureth his father: if I then be a father, where is mine honour? saith the Lord of hosts." We are God's rebellious children, but still His children, and He does not give up His claim to us. We are His rebellious children, but also His redeemed children, reconciled as a race, and invited to become reconciled individually and personally. As soon as we leave the ranks of the rebellious and return to our Father, we avail ourselves of the reconciliation effected by the blood of the Cross, and the Lord Almighty receives us with most loving welcome as His sons and daughters.

For to whom is this promise addressed? To those who separate themselves from whatever they know to be wrong in the practices and habits of the world, convinced that there can be no real fellowship between righteousness and unrighteousness,—no communion between light and darkness,—no identity of feeling on the most momentous of all subjects between those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and those who do not.

Does this mean that God will not receive us until we are personally holy? Jesus Christ came, "not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Was the prodigal holy before his Father received him? He came just as he was, in misery and rags, but he came confessing his sins and forsaking them. So we must come. But, if we cannot be holy in the first place, how are we to draw near to a holy God? Jesus said, "I am the way." "Yet can I be sure that I am welcome to draw near to God by that way, even now when I have nothing to recommend me but my utter helplessness?" Yes; He says, "Him that cometh unto me I will in nowise cast out." The way is open to any one who will walk in it. You do not need to bring anything to recommend you to the Lord Jesus. If you are simply anxious to return to God by Him, you have only to come; that is, to trust Him, to believe Him, and act accordingly. He will welcome you at once. The invitation is to all without exception. The chief of sinners is not shut out. Hear the prophet, using another figure:—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk [*i.e.* obtain all spiritual blessings, even the best] without money and without price." "And will the Father really receive me on these terms for Christ's sake?" Can you doubt His own words? "I will receive you, and will be a father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

All this is explicit. There is no excuse for misapprehending or overlooking what is so plain. Whatever can cheer the heart in the days of sorrow,—whatever can strengthen it in the presence of danger,—whatever can relieve it under a sense of guilt,—whatever can calm it in the midst of anxiety,—whatever can sustain us under the pressure of care,—whatever can invigorate our faith, or calm our fears, or irradiate our hopes with the sunshine of heaven,—all is included in this Divine promise, "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."

Can it be that, notwithstanding our sins, God is still willing to be a Father unto us?—still ready to receive us back as His sons and daughters? The phrase "children of God" often falls upon the ear without awakening any such emotion as the idea might be expected to stir up within us. God grant that it may not be so to-day, but that we may take to heart the great significance of the words. Consider our past. Have we any adequate notion of what it is to be in rebellion against the Lord Almighty. An adequate notion of it we never can have in this world. If we are the disciples of Christ, growing in grace day by day, then we are seeing more and more of the evil of sin and the fearful guilt of opposing God. If we are not the disciples of Christ, we are in the dark on the subject. We may use the common phraseology of confession, but the heart continues blind, and the phrases are nothing more to us than dead forms, and there the matter ends. God will not accept such confessions. He is a heart-searching God. We may deceive our fellow-men, we may deceive ourselves, but we cannot deceive Him. The promise is that, if we will come to Him in His own appointed way and separate ourselves from all intimate alliance with His enemies, He will receive us back as His sons and daughters, and make us feel that He is (what all along He hath been) our loving Father, that He hath cast all our sins behind His back, that he will subdue our iniquities and bury them in the depths of the sea.

Do you believe this? Do you believe that the text is in very deed and truth a message from God, the Lord Almighty, and that He desires to fulfil the promise by blessing you? Or do you imagine that it must be intended for others, and that you have no part or lot in the promises? What reason can you have to think that you are excluded? It is true you are a sinner. Nothing can be more certain. But "this is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." You are one of the very persons, therefore, for whom the Gospel was intended. God is "not willing that any should perish." He is not

willing that you should perish. Yet many will be left in outer darkness when their brethren go in to the marriage-supper of the Lamb. No exceptions are made in the invitation, and no promise can fail in the case of any who come; but it is folly, it is madness, to presume on God's forbearance by continuing in self-indulgence and venturing to delay. His mercy is infinite, but they who despise it shall suffer. "Because I have called and ye refused; I have stretched out my hands and no man regarded; therefore I will laugh at your calamity: I will mock when your fear cometh." Terrible words these, dictated by infinite love. There is a limit, then, to God's long-suffering. You may already be near the line beyond which it will not follow you. After a certain point is passed, God will stay His hand no longer. Beware how you trifle with present opportunities. Your last hour upon earth will soon strike, and then, if you have not accepted the Gospel and returned to your Father,—then,—what follows? Oh! how shall you escape if you neglect so great salvation?

Observe where you stand if the Lord Almighty is *not* recognized by you as your Father. There is but one alternative. If you are not His loving sons and daughters, you are through your own perverseness His enemies, and you may expect to be dealt with as such.

Christ said to those who sought to kill Him because He told them the truth and spoke to them "God's words," "Ye are of your father, the devil." By resisting the grace of God and grieving the Holy Spirit, who strives with us in order to reclaim us, men make themselves the children of the devil, that is, his slaves. To him, nevertheless, they do not belong. They are not their own. They are redeemed.

Surely it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God—to appear at His bar as enemies, who have despised and rejected His mercy. What but accumulated wrath can be the portion of such? What hope can there be of averting this doom? We have to do with the Lord Almighty. His will is the law of the universe. And even now, how can you have any true enjoyment of the

gifts of One with whom you are at open war? Must you not expect that His gifts will be turned into curses? that your very comforts will prove snares to you; that your very abundance of the good things of this life, like that of the rich man in the Gospel, will tempt you to neglect all preparation for the life which is to come? And when the hour arrives, at which all these things must be left behind, what prospect can you have of peace or happiness beyond? At present, you may see no cause for alarm. Your friends are around you, and the world smiles upon you. You are no worse than your neighbours, and your neighbours are not afraid. But let sickness come and lay you prostrate: let the darkened chamber and the noiseless footsteps intimate that your life is in danger: let the shadows of eternity seem to gather around your soul, which now begins to realize the terrors of such a position: finally, let your physician tell you that human skill can avail no further, and that within a few hours you must die; then you will find that a change has taken place in your valuation of things temporal and spiritual. Then you would give all your possessions for a short respite. Your mind will be filled with apprehension, and your heart will sink within you, though you may affect calmness; as many have doubtless done, lest they should distress the lookers-on. At last your eye will become fixed and glassy; the cold sweat will stand upon your brow; you will struggle for breath, and, by-and-by, in a moment, your spirit will take its flight—whither?—ah! whither will it go? The question then, will not be whether you were a respectable person in the opinion of your neighbours, but whether you can claim to be admitted into the Paradise of the blessed, as one of the sons or daughters of the Lord Almighty.

How, then, can we now realize this divine relationship?

It can only be through conscious union with Jesus Christ, the mediator of the New Covenant. His younger brethren are "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." And this consciousness of union with Christ is the consequence of believing in Him.

If you feel your need of a Saviour, it must be because you are taught by the Spirit of God to regard sin as the cause of misery and danger, and to desire to be freed from its guilt and dominion.

If you believe Christ to be your Saviour now, it is because you have been taught in like manner to rely upon the efficacy of His Atonement and the sincerity of His invitations.

If you really trust in Christ, you will be a grateful disciple, a loving disciple, a zealous disciple. You will endeavour to do all to the glory of God. In the duties of your profession or ordinary calling, you will strive to act upon Christian principles,—to avoid and discountenance whatever is forbidden,—to love and obey whatever is commanded. You will cheerfully consecrate part of your time to the worship of God and the study of His communications; and, within your own sphere, it will be your hearty desire to imitate the example of your heavenly Master who went about doing good.

Thus the atonement of Christ becomes the ground of your hope, and the example of Christ, the standard of your obedience.

What a change to one who all his life long has been going on in sin! It is a change from darkness to light: it is a coming from under the power of Satan, to be under the power of God. This is not a mere outward reformation: it is truly a change of heart. It is moving from a position in which the wrath of God is kindling around you, to a place of safety under the shadow of His wings. It is turning from fellowship with those whose throat is an open sepulchre, and whose souls are laden with iniquity, to communion with God in Christ, and with all the pure and blessed spirits in the dominions of our Creator. It is leaving the camp of Satan for the camp of the Lord of hosts. It is leaving the road that leads to the second death, for the way that shall bring all who walk therein to life and immortality. It is shaking off the bondage of the devil and our lusts, and entering upon the glorious liberty of the sons of God.

To come to God through Christ, is to discover that we

are the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, and begin to live in a manner suitable to our rank. The King of angels is our elder brother. "In him we are complete." Are we ignorant? "The Holy Scriptures are able to make us wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Are we assailed by our spiritual enemies? He hath said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you." Are our trials and temptations very great? "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will, with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Do we need sympathy, in the midst of our trials? "We have not a high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Are we conscious of great weakness in spiritual things? "He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Are we in trouble? "Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." Or having taken leave of the world which is receding from us, have we the near prospect of death? "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee." "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."

Promises like these, when really believed, bring such peace to the soul as the world can neither give nor take away,—peace which makes one in a great measure independent of outward circumstances,—peace which has often rendered the poorest hovel, to its occupant, the very ante-chamber of heaven. Has this peace been sought and found by you? Oh, shall we not watch and work and pray? Shall we not strive to walk worthy of our high calling, as the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty; and to make the light of our example shine, that others may believe, and glorify our heavenly Father?

XXXI.

A VOICE OUT OF THE CLOUD.

"Behold, a voice out of the cloud which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him."—*St. Matt.* xvii. 5.

THIS is one of the few instances in which God the Father is represented in the Bible as speaking directly to man. Christ Himself says, "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand." All souls and bodies,—all things in the invisible world, as well as in the visible,—in short, the universe of created mind and matter, the Father hath given in charge to the Son. Transactions between (what we are obliged, for want of a better term, to call) the Persons of the Deity, are beyond our conception, and are, of necessity, pure revelation. But what has been revealed on the subject permits us to catch wonderful glimpses of the love and purposes of God toward His human offspring. Christ is the only-begotten and beloved Son in whom the Father is well pleased. Yet the divine Father "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all." "Shall he not, with him, also freely give us all things?" all things good for us, when we are capable of receiving them, and in proportion to our capacity to receive them? Shall He not? St. Paul gives a clear answer. God hath "made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself; that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in

heaven and which are on earth." "For by him (Christ) were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him and for him." "For it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself." Keep in mind these words of Holy Writ. This is "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations," says the Apostle: and, though revealed to the apostle, and proclaimed by him over and over again, in language bursting with joy and triumph, it is a mystery which has *continued* to be hid from ages and generations. In fact, there have been in the world, all along, two gospels,—the great gospel and a little one:—the great gospel which Paul preached to the Colossians and the Ephesians, feeling that words were too feeble to sustain the grandeur of the thought; and the little gospel which has come down to us from some of the orthodox fathers through the Roman Church. And yet it is easier, methinks, to believe Paul's gospel than the popular one; and I see abundant proof, year by year, that this conviction is growing in the minds of honest thinkers all over Christendom; though many are gagged by their interests, and many by a nervous fear of offending the weak. Yet they who care only for truth, need fear nothing from the timidity of friends or the bitterness of foes. It would be as reasonable to think of pushing back the tide, as of stemming the progress of religious thought by episcopal protests or party demonstrations. If there is error, those who *can* may expose it. If the doctrine, on the contrary, is murdered truth risen from the dead, let all men acknowledge its vitality and its power.

That this gathering together in one of all things in Christ, gives a blessed and glorious view of the character of God,—that it makes one thankful for having been born into the family of a loving Father, allwise, omnipotent, omnipresent,—that it solves the darkest problems which confront us in actual life, cannot be denied. And

when you add to this, that we affirm the impossibility of accounting for large passages of the New Testament on any other scheme, without treating the language as no father would like to see the language of his letters treated by a son, you are bound in conscience thoroughly to examine the Record before you allow yourself to speak against the doctrine.

Whom does the text command us to hear? Him in whom the Father is well pleased,—the Divine Son, the beloved Son, who speaks to us directly in the gospels, and indirectly in the various revelations which, by the Spirit, He afterwards gave to His Apostles, and even now confirms by the voice of the same Spirit in our consciences.

What comfort to know that all power in heaven and on earth is given to Him, who so loved us that He gave Himself for us!—that in Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily,—and that the Church, the Body of which He is the Head, is ultimately to be "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all!" This is something different, surely, from the Church of England, or the Church of Scotland, or the Church of Rome, or any of the circumscribed organizations established or devised by human authority. "The fulness of him that filleth all in all!" Wonderful definition of the Church of the future! This is the Church which He loved with an everlasting love; which He purchased with His own blood,—which He is sanctifying and cleansing through all the dispensations. This is the object of the grace of God, displaying the wisdom of God, and destined through eternity to show forth the praises of God. This is the Church in which the perfect unity, for which our Saviour prayed, shall at last be realized in its highest form. This is "the stone cut out without hands that smote the image, became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth." This is the "everlasting dominion which shall not pass away," and "the kingdom which shall not be destroyed." "The fulness of him that filleth all in all!" Wonderful, glorious words!

And how is this to be? How is the universal Church

to become "the fulness of him that filleth all in all,"—the fulness of God? By each individual being filled with that love which is the divine essence. And how is this to be? By hearing God's "beloved Son:" by attending earnestly to His teaching, weighing thoughtfully His very words, obeying His precepts, and following His example. There must be personal communion between the soul and Christ by the Holy Ghost. The Spirit of Christ is the Holy Ghost, which proceedeth from the Father and the Son. When the Holy Ghost is welcomed in the soul of the believer, He dwells there, and His fruits begin to appear,—love, joy, peace, long suffering, temperance, gentleness, goodness, faith; and now there is real communion with the Father and the Son. This communion is more or less conscious in proportion to our earnestness in using the means. I pray you to mark this. It is very important. Many talk and think, as if they were perfectly helpless, and shut up to a certain fate. But for the grace and mercy of God in sending His beloved Son, we should have been helpless indeed. But, now, the case is far otherwise. Our help has been laid upon One that is mighty,—not only mighty, but Almighty. All power is committed unto Him in Heaven and earth. And as surely as He is almighty, so surely shall every soul that trusts in Him be saved, and blest, and glorified, and made a partaker of the divine nature, through union with Him.

Do you say that this is a hard saying,—too hard to be believed,—too good to be true? Will you state to yourself distinctly your reasons for thinking this incredible? Try to put them down on paper for your own satisfaction. (That is the best way to get a clear notion of any argument.) Why should it seem to you an incredible thing that God should raise beings, originally created in His own image, to union with Himself? Previous to revelation, we could not know what God might intend to do. We might have indulged in conjectures: but what would they have been worth? But since God has spoken, not only by prophets, but, when the time came, by His "beloved Son," we have declarations which may most

surely be relied upon. And not one word of His divine announcements recorded in the Bible contradicts the divine voice speaking in our conscience. It is impossible to allege any reason why it may not please God, who created and redeemed our human nature, to raise it into everlasting union with Himself. We are sinners; but He has redeemed us. We are most unworthy; but our unworthiness is covered by our Saviour's merits. We have no natural inclination to become Godlike: but the Holy Spirit can make us Godlike; and His power for this blessed purpose is guaranteed to every soul that diligently seeks Him.

"But how can I diligently seek Him," you say, "if I have no inclination to become what He would make me?" Examine that objection patiently; and you will see how empty it is, how weak, how foolish. In order to gain what seems to you a desirable end, you do hundreds of things which you are far from being inclined to. How diligently you seek worldly advancement, in order to secure temporal provision for yourself and those dependent upon you! How you sacrifice inclination every day, by working hard, and denying yourself many gratifications, that you may gain your end! The fact is, your reason tells you, that in a certain course of action lies your interest: and you will not listen to inclination, drawing you off to pleasures and indulgences. You know that every ordinary man who succeeds, must make up his mind to steady effort, and continual self-restraint, and frequent self-denial. Why not apply this in the case of your eternal interests? You know that you cannot make yourself holy: but you know what God has done, and what He is now ready to do for you. The promises of the Gospel are addressed to you personally. What you have to do, is to pray earnestly that God may incline you to accept them; to meditate upon them continually; and to do everything you *can* do in the way of obedience. This involves effort and self-restraint and self-denial. But you submit to all these for mere temporal purposes, to attain results which are comparatively trivial. Will you sacrifice nothing for eternal glory? Oh, it is won-

derful how easily we allow ourselves to be deluded by weak and foolish objections, in a case involving so much —involving our souls, our happiness, our all. Let me beseech you to pause and consider; and to do so, not to-morrow, or next week, or next year, but now, this very day. What are all the fleeting advantages of rank and fortune? What are all the mere gratifications of sense, in comparison with what is now pressed upon your attention? You know in your heart that they are nothing in comparison,—not worthy to be spoken of. It is not arguments to prove that, that you require: but a new heart and a right spirit, which the God who made you is waiting to bestow, if you will only humble yourself, and use the means which He has placed within your reach.

God's voice "out of the cloud," said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." Jesus said, on another occasion, "He that believeth on me, believeth not on me (*i. e.* on me only) but on him that sent me. For I have not spoken of myself (*i. e.* I am not a mere man uttering my own opinions): but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment what I should say, and what I should speak." Will you not listen to God, speaking by His Son? And in what manner do you think He ought to be listened to? Surely not as you would listen to a mere human teacher, however eminent; not merely with reverence and humility, but with holy awe, and absolute, undoubting confidence. It was to be expected that God would reveal Himself to His creatures in some way: and He has revealed Himself in a manner which reason and conscience attest to be infinitely worthy of Himself. The more you look into, and study, the Revelation, the more you will admire and reverence it. For Christ Himself—the eternal Word —is the essence of the Revelation. And by believing in Christ, you believe in God; you draw near to God; you bring your spirit into communication with God; you open your heart to receive the grace of God, which will transform your fallen and corrupt nature into the long-lost image of God. Is not this Christianity? Is not

this a glorious, elevating, sublime religion? Yet are there none—I put it to your consciences—who treat it with cold indifference? who deny it openly every day in practice? who live, in short, as if it were an exploded myth? When Dr. Halley, one day, made some objection to Christianity, in the hearing of Sir Isaac Newton, Newton said, "Dr. Halley, when you speak of the mathematics, I am glad to listen to you; because you have studied the subject. But I will not hear you when you speak against Christianity, because you have not studied it. I have; and I know that your objections are worthless and that Christianity is divine," or words to that effect. But we rest nothing on the authority of human genius, however exalted, on human names, however famous. Hear Christ Himself. Hear the beloved Son of God. "If any man is willing to do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Real earnestness, humility, and candour, over an open Bible, will not be allowed to go permanently wrong. If, then, I address any who are neglecting the Word of God, —and I cannot doubt but I do,—I pray you to begin at once to study it with earnest prayer for light. God will not turn a deaf ear to you. He is seeking you more diligently than you ever sought Him. Try to realize this. The voice that spake out of the cloud is true. It was the voice of the living God. Jesus Christ is His beloved Son, at His right-hand exalted, with all power given unto Him in heaven and on earth. "If they escaped not, who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."

XXXII.

THE SCRIPTURES.

"Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me that ye might have life."—*St. John* v. 39, 40.

THESE words were spoken by our Lord in Jerusalem. On the Sabbath-day He cured a man of 'an infirmity which had continued for eight-and-thirty years. "Therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus and sought to slay Him." "But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto and I work." This was His answer to their charge that He worked on the Sabbath. "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God." Then, far from disclaiming this equality, He went on to assert it. He tells them that "What things soever the Father doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise." He tells them that, "as the Father raiseth up the dead and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom He will." He tells them that it was the purpose of the Father "that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father." Thus He plainly declared His equality with God, declared that He was Himself God, one with the Father; for never could it be said of the highest archangel or seraph that all men were required to honour *him* even as they honour the Father. Mark this well. The Jews accused Jesus of "making Himself equal with God." He not only admitted that He had made the

claim, but He re-asserted it as His right; and it was because He continued to insist upon it that He was afterwards crucified; for it was not the alleged interference with the sovereignty of Cæsar that the Jews cared to punish, but what they considered the blasphemy, in that He, being a man (and, they maintained, nothing more), made Himself equal with God.

Then, after claiming to be honoured as the Father is honoured, our Lord proceeds to speak of His power to raise the spiritually dead—yea, it appears, even those who were also literally dead—to spiritual and eternal life; and to raise "all that are in the graves," to be dealt with according to their character.

Here a new subject comes in. Our Lord knows that they are doubting or absolutely disbelieving. He meets the question of testimony. He allows that the case demands evidence. "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me." "Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness of me," according to the measure of light and grace given unto him from above. John testified that Jesus was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." "But I receive not testimony from man;" even John the Baptist by his testimony added nothing to my claims. "I have greater witness than that of John." "The works that I do bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." My miracles bear witness that I am the promised Messiah, "the Saviour of the world," sent by the Father. They have been wrought, not like those of prophets and Apostles, but by the power and authority of the Father in me; for "the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works." They testify that I am one with the Father, and therefore that my person is divine. "The Father Himself hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time nor seen His shape." Both at my baptism and at my transfiguration, the Father owned me as his Son by an audible voice from heaven, though ye heard it not; and He hath revealed me in His written Word. But "ye have not His Word abiding in you;" for this is clear from the fact that "whom He hath sent, Him ye believe not."

"Search the Scriptures;" search them thoroughly; "for in them ye think ye have eternal life," because ye are familiar with the outward letter; "and they are they that testify of me;" yet, though they do, "ye will not come to me," of whom they testify, that ye might have that eternal life which is promised in me and in me only; for I am that promised seed of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

It was a saying of the rabbis that "he who acquires the words of the Law obtains for himself eternal life."* There were other sayings of the rabbis to the same effect. To these probably our Lord alludes. Certainly He refers to their overweening and superstitious confidence in the possession of the letter of the Scriptures, as if that, without the love of God and man which they enjoined, could secure their eternal salvation. But He exposes their inconsistency. The Scriptures predicted the Messiah, and He, in His own person and work, was fulfilling the predictions. Yet they would not come to Him; they would not receive Him, whom God the Father had sent; and this was their condemnation, that light—*the* light, the predicted light—had come into the world, but they "loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

It is hardly necessary to say that when our Lord uttered the words of the text, the Jewish Scriptures of the Old Testament were the only Scriptures to which He could refer, as no book of the New Testament had yet been written. *We* have the New Testament as well as the Old. If the Old testified of Christ, how much more does the New! There can be no doubt, therefore, as to *our* obligation to search both; and we are taught that the use of them is to bring us to Christ, that in Him and by union with Him we may have eternal life, as partakers of that fountain of life which He, being divine, has in Himself; and as the Jews were warned against superstitious confidence in the mere possession of the letter, so are we. Having the Bible in our libraries will not secure for us eternal life; having the Bible in

* Schottgen, quoted by Alford *in loco*.

our memory even will not save us. We must come to Him of whom the Bible testifies; we must believe in Him whom it principally reveals; we must be made spiritually alive by Him who came into the world on purpose that we might have life, eternal life, and, if we will, the beginning of that life now. Unless the possession of the Scriptures has this effect, they only increase our responsibility. We have the revelation which they contain of God's love, and of the way of salvation through Christ, and of the Holy Spirit as the divine Teacher ever at hand to lead us step by step into all truth, according to our capacity, and diligence, and obedience to what we have already learned. If this Revelation has no transforming effect upon our character, it does not, so far as we are concerned, answer the purpose for which it is intended. Let no man, therefore, imagine that acquaintance with the letter of Scripture is to act as a charm for the salvation of souls that continue to be without love to God and man. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and all thy strength, and all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, viz. this, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." This is the teaching of Christ Himself. Supreme love to God and sincere love to our neighbour He declares to be the essential and permanent doctrine of the Old Testament as well as of the New.

For it must be continually borne in mind that many things which were sanctioned under the old dispensation during the earlier education of the heir in his childhood are not allowable under the new. In the Old Testament polygamy was allowed, and concubinage was allowed, and great facility of divorce, at the mere caprice of the husband, was allowed, and slavery was allowed; and the depopulation of whole districts by fire and sword in aggressive warfare of the most savage kind, is spoken of as divinely sanctioned. All these are contrary to the letter and spirit of Christianity. It is necessary, therefore, to distinguish between what was temporary and

what was permanent; between what was the duty of Jews, at a particular time and in particular circumstances, and what is the duty of all men, at all times and in all circumstances.

But the main subject of the Old Testament, as well as of the New, is the same, though presented in aspects widely different. The main subject is man's bondage to sin and his redemption through Christ. Of this the whole history of the Exodus and the Levitical system from first to last is a vivid pictorial representation. There is hardly any part of the Bible which has not some reference, more or less direct, to this main subject. And when you remember that all the manifestations of God during the Old Testament were in the person of Jehovah Jesus, Jehovah the Angel or Messenger, in His pre-incarnate state, it is at once obvious that Christ is to be found prominent throughout the sacred volume. The Scriptures, under histories and biographies, in types and shadows, in Proverbs and Psalms and Prophecies, testify of Christ the Son of God, God manifested, the Redeemer of mankind, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

To Him, then, we are to look as the end and aim of a revelation adapted to the wants of sinful and guilty beings. "In Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily." The more we search the Scriptures, in a humble and teachable and earnest spirit, the more evidence we shall discover of this. And in reading the Bible thus, we find that the effect upon our minds is different from that produced by the perusal of any other book whatever. We are in a different atmosphere; we are breathing a purer air, at a higher elevation. We see, too, that "what things were written aforetime were written for *our* instruction," who live at a period so much later and in circumstances so widely diverse. We find that the Old Testament Scriptures as well as the New are "profitable" to us "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." We find that the life and immortality which are brought to light in the Gospel are not left out of view even in the

dim prefigurements of the earlier economy. We find, in short, that the Abrahamic and Christian dispensations are parts of one whole; that the Jews were elected to be God's peculiar people, in order that they might one day become the teachers of mankind; that what was once narrow and partial is now catholic and universal; and all through Christ, "the Lord our righteousness," our life, our joy, our song, and our salvation. Then shall it be said of any of us that we will not come to Him that we may have life? To whom else can we go? How else can we prosper? How else can we be saved? How secure eternal life from this time forth and for ever? "There is none other name under Heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Let us pray for that faith which is "the gift of God," and which we are utterly unable to attain without His gracious aid. And, while we continue to pray, let us not cease to "search the Scriptures," for they testify gloriously of Christ. Here are fields, rich with "the finest of the wheat;" but, precious and abundant though the harvest be, the reapers are comparatively few. Let us be among them. Our labour shall not be in vain. Ever and anon we shall find ourselves "making melody in our hearts unto the Lord." As we advance on our heavenward journey, truths rise up before us, like mountain-tops in dim perspective, attracting us onward and upward, rewarding and delighting us with new views as we ascend, spreading new landscapes at our feet, opening up passes hitherto unperceived, and showing us long familiar circumstances in new and important relations. Old knowledge vanishes away, as it becomes included in a knowledge which is higher, wider, grander, more complete.

Yet, whatever elevation we may, by God's grace, attain now, there will still be peaks above peaks beyond, which no mortal man can climb, heights of knowledge which, with our present faculties, we cannot reach; for here the wisest know but "in part." Let us be humble.

"O Christ, be thou our present joy,
Our future great reward.
Our only glory may it be
To glory in the Lord."

XXXIII.

REPENTANCE.

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin."—1 *John* i. 7.

As certain subjects are set apart for our special consideration at the various ecclesiastical seasons, and the practice of considering the leading doctrines of the Bible in a fixed and appropriate succession has been found to be spiritually profitable, it is our duty at present* to turn our attention more particularly to the subject of Repentance. This is a subject of which the Christian will never lose sight so long as sin remains; yet no one can reasonably object to devoting a certain season to the fuller consideration of that which at all seasons concerns our highest welfare and claims our thoughtful attention.

Permit me to set before you these leading ideas:—

1. That, without Faith, there can be no true and lasting repentance.

2. That Repentance, like Faith, is the gift of God.

3. That it is "the blood of Jesus Christ," and not Repentance, that "cleanseth us from all sin."

1. Without Faith, there can be no true and lasting repentance.

The Hebrew word for Repentance denotes *conversion* or *return;* the Greek word signifies *change of mind or purpose.* Repentance, then, means changing our mind as to our true interest, living with a new purpose, turning

* Preached in Lent.

from our sinful ways to the loving service of our Heavenly Father, and sincerely deploring our past wanderings.

No man will thus repent, unless he believes in the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour. No man will leave present enjoyment until he has found what appears to him better. By nature, the hearts of all of us are set upon the things of the world. This wrong bias can be corrected only by the Spirit of God. We must discover that through Christ we may attain to higher and more enduring pleasures than any which have hitherto attracted our desires and occupied our thoughts. This discovery cannot be made without a degree of illumination from the Holy Spirit of God. This truth cannot be received into the soul as a reality, without a measure of faith in the divine Saviour. The very idea of *spiritual* enjoyment is repugnant to the natural heart. At first it is looked upon as a delusion,—the effect of imagination, or the morbid product of a mind diseased. Then the force of evidence leads one to doubt whether it may not perhaps be real. Not a step further can the doubter advance without divine teaching,—without light from above,—light shining upon the Cross of Christ, as the spiritual centre of all spiritual knowledge. When this great central fact, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,—that He died for sinners,—that He bare our sins in His own body on the tree,—is in some degree realized by the awakened soul, then everything assumes a new aspect; the one desire of the heart is to be able to appropriate the benefits thus procured,—to feel sure that one has a personal interest in the atonement made for sin, and a personal exemption from the guilt incurred, and the punishment due, on account of it. Then when the sinner begins to have a trembling, half-doubting belief that his sins are forgiven,—faith scarce perceptible, it may be, faith "as a grain of mustard seed," he begins immediately to repent,—to regret the sins which made such an expiation necessary, to change his whole plan of life, to turn from his former ways unto the Lord his God, to watch over his conduct continually, fearing lest he should offend his heavenly Father to whom he has been reconciled,

lest he should crucify afresh the Lord Jesus, through whom he has been reconciled, and lest he should grieve the Holy Spirit, by whose mysterious operation the efficacy of the Saviour's finished work has been inwardly manifested and personally applied. This is evangelical repentance, the repentance preached by our Saviour Himself, as well as by prophets and Apostles. We say by prophets,—for you will find, that, in the Old Testament as well as in the New, the promise of forgiveness is continually urged as the great motive to repentance. Threats of punishment against disobedience are often added; but the promise to loving obedience is constantly renewed. Now, where there is real dread of the threat, there will be also more or less belief in the promise; and where this faith, however weak, clings to Christ, there will certainly be repentance; not a mere temporary and superficial reformation of the outward conduct, but an inward and searching self-examination,—an anxious watching against whatever is offensive in the sight of God,—and a fixed and permanent determination, in reliance on divine strength, to walk in the new way, to act on new principles, and to maintain a new character. There may be an outward washing of one's self, or turning from habits of gross wickedness to habits of religious regularity, which proceeds entirely from fear of punishment,—fear *lest perhaps* punishment may follow in another state of existence. This is not true repentance. Those who repent thus only, are like the Pharisees called in the Gospel "whited sepulchres," fair without, but full of loathsome corruption within. In such cases there is no clinging to Christ, no saving belief of the Gospel. The heart is not changed. The springs of action remain as before. There is no true love of God as our Father, no trust in His mercy through our divine Mediator. There may be great observance of rites and ceremonies, of times and seasons, and of those duties which attract the gaze and command the admiration of man; but as there is no real faith, so there is no real repentance. There is either hypocrisy or self-deception, commonly the latter. We might preach to you Sunday after Sunday for a lifetime

about the evil of sin and the beauty of holiness,—the advantage of being in the path of duty and the misery of being out of it; but all this moralizing would have no more effect in bringing you to true repentance than the sighing of the wind among the trees, unless you discover in Christ what will *more than make up a thousand times for any apparent sacrifice* which you are called upon to make, and unless you see in His character such beauty as makes your own character look black indeed. But if you obtain even a glimpse of His infinite love,—if you are sure for one hour that His love embraces *you*, and that He was pierced for *your* sins, and that *you* are no longer under condemnation; then a revolution will take place in your soul, which all the threatenings of a violated law, and all the maxims of an utilitarian morality never could produce, if you were ever so much terrified by the thunders of Sinai, or ever so much fascinated by the sentiments of the philosopher. Then you will find that faith and true repentance go together; and that without the former, the latter cannot possibly exist.

II. Repentance, like Faith, is the gift of God.

This will be evident, when it is considered that such repentance must be based on a right apprehension of the real nature of sin, and a distinct view of God's mercy in Christ. Neither the one nor the other is ever attained without the illuminating grace of the Holy Ghost, which is offered to all who earnestly seek it. Consequently any practice founded on these principles is as truly from God, as the principles themselves. Repentance requires us to crucify the flesh with the affections and lusts,—to starve the old nature which was born with us, and which adheres to us,—to mortify our corruptions,—to abandon at once and for ever the pleasures of sin, as our portion. Can we do this without the grace of God? No more than a leper can shake off his leprosy. Reason may teach a man that indulgence in some sins is hurtful. Reason may convince him that he would be happier if he could abandon them. But the grace of God alone can induce him to forego all sin,—even the sin which most easily besets him,—to determine to resist every form of evil,

even in its first beginnings in the heart. Too many set about the work of repentance, as if nothing were needed but a firm resolution. The consequence, inevitably, is failure. Even when the grace of God is acknowledged to be necessary, we are very apt, in practice, to proceed as if it were not. Continual dependence upon divine grace is evidenced by habitual, frequent, and earnest prayer. Without this, repentance cannot exist. The great end of repentance is holiness,—the restoration of the Divine image in the soul. Can this be effected by good resolutions made in our own strength? or by any human instrumentality whatever? Earnest supplication at the throne of grace, and patient waiting upon God for His answers, are indispensable. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above." True repentance is such a gift. It must be from God. To Him we must apply. On Him we must depend. His Holy Spirit must be our teacher. His Holy Word must be our guide. It is thus, and thus only, that we can attain such a state of heart and mind, that it shall be our meat and our drink to do the will of our heavenly Father. And unless we desire, at least, to live thus, it cannot truly be said that we repent. In short, the beginning of repentance is the beginning of holiness. It is chiefly because we desire to become like our Master, and because we are striving after this, and because we see that whatever is opposed to Him is hateful, that we who trust in Jesus deplore the sins into which we are constantly falling. Now, the habitual imitation of Christ is a holy life; although it is true, that the gradual work of sanctification is always much interrupted by the struggles of expiring lusts, which, though crucified, are not yet dead. The influences which are thus hostile to the spiritual life, being sinful, must be, and are deplored. We must pray that their strength may diminish daily. We must watch against them, as against armed foes. We must put our trust, not in any success with which, from time to time, we may be enabled to meet their incursions, but solely in the finished work of the great Captain of our salvation, who hath already triumphed over sin, and achieved the victory

on our behalf,—a victory, the fruits of which will survive all the infirmities and shortcomings of them that believe.

III. It is "the blood of Jesus Christ"—and *not repentance*—that "cleanseth from all sin."

This is very important. Ages of repentance, however sincere, could not wash away a single stain of guilt, or abridge by a single moment the duration of deserved punishment. In other words, *repentance is no atonement.* Yet is it not a very common error to regard repentance as if it were? as if it were at least in part an atonement,—as if our repentance were to be added to the atonement of Christ for the expiation of our sins and the procuring of our pardon? Never was there a more dangerous error. It is founded in a total misapprehension of the nature of Redemption. Its influence on the spiritual life is withering. If we build on Christ's work, we cannot build on our own: if we build on our own work, we cannot build on His. There is no middle ground. As His name, through faith in His name, made the lame man strong who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple, so in Him we must trust for a happy future, and in Him alone. The blood of Jesus Christ alone cleanseth from all sin—alone washeth away all guilt—alone averteth all punishment. "Whatever thy necessities are, in Jesus' name there is a supply for all. Art thou poor? He is rich. Sick? He is thy health. Weak? He is strong. Sinful? He is the Lord thy righteousness. In everything, and in every way, upon all accounts, and upon all occasions, His name, through faith in His name, is the universal charm, the everlasting remedy, supply, comfort, strength, of all. Oh, then let us look to Him, and His name, and work alone, in every time of need. Notwithstanding all thy shortcomings and backslidings, He will nevertheless (this nevertheless is still in the covenant), He will nevertheless save for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power to be known."* The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,—first from its guilt, then from its dominion, then from its remaining influence.

* Dr. Hawker.

Let these three truths be borne in mind continually—

That, without faith, there can be no true and lasting repentance:

That repentance, like faith, is the gift of God: and

That it is "the blood of Jesus Christ," and not repentance, that "cleanseth us from all sin."

"Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." "Unto you, therefore, which believe, he is precious,"—"Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption?"

XXXIV.

CONFESSED OR DENIED BY CHRIST.

"Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven." But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven."—*St. Matthew* x. 32, 33.

If we are not willing to confess Christ before men, why are we here? Why have we joined in repeating the form of sound words contained in the Creed? Why have we said *Amen* to prayers in which we profess to worship Christ as God,—to acknowledge Him as our Lord and Master—as our divine Teacher—our divine High Priest, and our divine King, who is now ascended up on high? Why have we been so inconsistent? If we do not mean to confess Christ before men, how is it possible to defend this?

Perhaps one replies, "I have not yet made up my mind to be a true Christian, and my heart certainly still clings to the world; but it is my duty, I know, to go to church, and to be in the way of receiving spiritual benefit. I do love the pleasures of sin, though I know that such pleasures are fleeting, and unsatisfying even while they last; but having been trained in the outward duties of religion, I should be ill at ease if I entirely neglected them; and who knows but, by-and-by, I may reform my life and devote myself to God sincerely."

Such, no doubt, are the thoughts which pass through many a mind, when some self-examination is thrust upon it. That it is the duty of all to join, if possible, in the

public worship of God is certain: but is it not equally clear that it is the duty of all to be sincere,—to worship God who is a Spirit "in spirit and in truth"? How are you to excuse insincerity? How are you to excuse delay? If you put off your full acceptance of the Gospel to a more convenient season, have you any guarantee that the future opportunities, on which you reckon so securely, will be given? May you not be summoned away before you have come to a decision? Do you not know that he who perseveres in impenitence and unbelief, becomes more and more hardened? Your own sober reflection must condemn such a course. But although you are convinced that a religious life is, beyond all comparison, the safest, the happiest, and therefore the wisest and the best, you are not yet persuaded to enter upon it now. Here lies the main difficulty. Arguments will never prove sufficient motives unless God touch the heart. The intellect may be satisfied, while the affections continue to cling to objects which are admitted to be unworthy.

How is this difficulty to be surmounted? If we depended on mere human agency, we might at once give up the case, and retire from the field. Success would be impossible. But we are encouraged by looking to the past, and remembering what has been accomplished. We see that for eighteen hundred years there has been a living Christianity in the world; sometimes, indeed, scarcely discernible, but never extinct. It must have died out and disappeared, *but for the invisible power of the living God.* That power has never ceased to manifest itself; and the more it has been sought for, the more it has been felt. Our duty, then, is to be "instant in prayer" to God, for the outpouring of His Spirit, without which no soul or no Church can truly prosper. Our duty is to obey the motions of the Holy Spirit within us now; for this unseen power is continually striving with us while we are thoughtless, urging us to repentance. Our duty is to make a strong effort at once, in dependence on divine aid, to shake off the bonds that have hitherto deprived us of the enjoyment of that liberty with which

Christ makes free. We must give up all known sin; for, if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. We must abandon all evil companionship; for there is no blessedness for the man who loves to sit in the chair of the scorner or to walk in the counsel of the ungodly. We must be determined to confess Christ before men, in full sincerity of heart—to trust in Him as our all—the Lord our righteousness, our strength, our hope, our salvation; and continually to seek communion with Him, in His Word, the Sacrament, and Prayer, *and in earnest endeavours to benefit our neighbour.* "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." If we are sincere in confessing Christ, we shall strive to imitate His example, and obey His commandments.

Manly decision in a good cause is always respected. Those who are destitute of it themselves, admire it in others. Fickleness, wavering, and a slavish fear of the opinions of our neighbours, are ever contemptible. Can any one be really respected, who confesses Christ with his lips, but denies Him in his life—who confesses Christ in the Church, but denies Him on the parade-ground or in the market-place—who confesses Christ on Sunday, but denies Him through the week? Would you hold up such a man as an example to your children? Would you not blush to have it thought that these remarks were applicable to yourself? Think what a fearful thing it is to deny Christ—to "deny the Lord that bought us"—our Saviour who "died for our sins and rose again for our justification." I do not now speak of avowed infidels or sceptics; but of those who admit the truth of the Gospel, yet are ashamed or unwilling to confess Christ in their daily life. We are faithful disciples only in proportion as we are like Christ: and we are like Christ, only in proportion as our will is in unison with the will of God in all things. To believe, to feel, to speak, to act, just as God would have us,—to aim continually at this, can alone make us truly blessed. For the channels of grace will be empty to us unless we desire to be in

perfect harmony with God. And the sooner we take this view, and get into this condition, the better it will be for us in the end, and the happier will be our life on earth. What we have to offer is this, our whole spirit and soul and body, as a living sacrifice unto God, to be made holy like Himself.

If we do thus devote ourselves to God, prayer will be a means of daily communion and of spiritual growth. And so will the inspired Word be. And the Sacrament too; and *all our unselfish efforts to help our fellow-creatures.* These will be means of blessing and enjoyment. Then, far from hesitating to confess Christ before men, we shall rejoice in the privilege of being permitted so to do. We shall be willing to suffer for His sake, whatever He may in His loving Providence require: for we shall have grace and strength at all times according to our need, and we shall know of a certainty, by experience, that greater is He who is in us, than all His enemies who are in the world.

I beseech you to think of these things. Your temporal business transacted during the week, however necessary in its own place, is not to be compared in importance with the business you transact with God. The Allseeing takes an account of your conduct, and you will have to answer for it. He is giving, and you are receiving. You are but stewards. He knows how you are fulfilling your stewardship. At least give some time to thought and reading on the subject of your future.

> "The numbered hour is on the wing
> That lays thee with the dead."

Be warned in time by the terrible words, uttered by the Lord who loved you and gave Himself for you, "Whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven." Whosoever lives and dies rejecting Christ, shall weep and wail in the outer darkness, when those who have made their calling and election sure go in to the marriage-banquet.

XXXV.

THE REDEEMER'S ARGUMENT.

"I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."—*Isaiah* xliv. 22.

WONDERFUL words! and wonderful, above all, that they should have been addressed to those who were still living away from God. Thou art wandering from thy Father, thou art keeping far away from me; return unto Me, for I have redeemed thee. Thou hast sinned all thy life long, and thou art sinning now; but I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions; I beseech thee, my son, "return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." I know that thou art very guilty, and that thou hast nothing to say for thyself; but I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, and therefore, "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions,"—sins numerous as the drops of moisture in a dense cloud. "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." Wilt thou not be moved by My love? Why shouldst thou stay away longer? There is now nothing for thee to fear, if thou wilt but return. Thou art already redeemed. Thy sins are already forgiven. Nothing remains but that thou return to the privileges of a son. Thou mayest be happy now if thou wilt return, notwithstanding all that is past. It is blotted out and forgotten, and buried in the depths of the sea. I entreat thee, therefore, to return and love Me who have so loved thee.

Who is it that speaks thus? Jehovah the Mediator, the Redeemer of mankind. This is Jehovah the angel, the

revealer of Deity, who redeemed the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, and who afterwards became man, and redeemed the race, by His blood shed upon the cross. In the interval between these events, He remonstrates with Israel, by the mouth of Isaiah His prophet. He shows them the folly and vanity of idols, the work of human hands, and says to Israel, "thou art *my* servant," thou art the servant of the living and only true God, for God hath revealed Himself to thee. What hast thou to do with idols? Yet indeed "thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." But notwithstanding all, though a case of grosser ingratitude and more obstinate transgression cannot be found in the world,—still "I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

The divine Saviour, long before His appearance in the flesh, said to Israel, "I have redeemed thee;" not merely because their ancestors had been delivered from bondage in Egypt, but because the redemption of mankind was settled in the counsels of God, and the mediation of the Redeemer was effectual before the incarnation.

We live in the light of a much clearer economy. Christ has come, and dwelt among us, and made many things plain which were before difficult. What immense power such an argument as the text contains ought to have over *us!* "Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee." "I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions." "I will not remember thy sins." I do not say merely that I *will* blot them out, that I will forgive at some future day, if thou shouldst reach a certain standard of goodness. Not at all. That is not what I say. What I say is this: "I *have* blotted out thy transgressions," "I have redeemed thee." Wilt thou not show, then, that thou art grateful? Wilt thou not love me, who did first love thee? I entreat thee to return unto me. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "Son, be of good cheer, thy sins are forgiven thee; go in peace." God "will have all men to be saved."

St. Paul says "I beseech you by the *mercies* of God." This is the chief argument used in the Bible,—the mercies of God. And of all His mercies, His mercies in Christ Jesus are the greatest beyond comparison. For His sake it is, indeed, that all mercies are bestowed. Then if we do indeed believe this, "we love him because he first loved us." We cannot help it; "the love of Christ constraineth us." Its power over us, when once we see its reality is irresistible. There is no motive in the world like love; and, of all love, love to Christ is the purest, the noblest, and the most powerful, for it transforms corrupt human nature into the image of the divine nature, as far as the capacity and present circumstances of the soul will allow. This transformation is little more than begun on earth. It will be going on for ever, as the capacity of the soul goes on increasing. No sin can enter into heaven; and the blessedness of being wholly free from sin is itself great beyond conception. But as the years of eternity roll on, each glorified soul united to Christ will continue to increase in resemblance to the divine nature. Is not this a blessed prospect? May we not beseech you by the mercies of God promised for the future, as well as by the mercies realized in the past? Who can imagine a stronger argument?

To each inquirer, then, we have this day a message, to every soul who cares for these things even a little, and wishes to be in the right way, and to learn to hate the wrong way. The callous will not listen. To every soul aspiring after higher and purer joys than it has found among the things of earth, we proclaim this message from God,—"I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins. Return unto me, for I have redeemed thee."

Let it not be said of you,—"Every one of them made excuse." Here is love that passeth knowledge. Resist not the grace of God. Open your heart to receive His truth and His love. Whoever you may be, all this is intended for you, as really as if God addressed you by name. There is no creature in the universe more welcome than you are to all the blessings of redemption, which include

everything that your soul can desire or need through eternity. Then why do you hesitate? Do you indeed hesitate? God is calling; will you refuse? You know not how many or how few times more this offer may be repeated to you before you die. But if you were to live on earth a thousand years, your wisdom would be—it would be your interest—to begin to love and serve God this day. Consider, then, what He hath done for you, and say whether He has not claims on your love. Say whether any claims can be compared with His. Think of the love of Christ. From His fulness you may receive as much blessedness as you are capable of receiving. In God's name, I entreat you to return, and live as becomes those whose past sins have been forgiven, blotted out like a thick cloud, and put out of remembrance for ever. Believe in Christ, in His love, in His truth, and you shall be saved;—made holy, blessed, glorious for ever. If you reject Him, be warned! what remaineth but "a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation" when the Lord shall come; because after having been redeemed and forgiven, you despised His love and made light of His mercy?

XXXVI.

NEW IDEAS TO JEWS.

"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost."—*St. Matthew* xviii. 11.

THIS was a new idea to the Jews. They did not consider themselves lost, in any sense. "We be Abraham's children, and were never in bondage." This was their boast. As a people they considered "themselves righteous, and despised others." They never thought of themselves as in any respect on a level with "sinners of the Gentiles." They were God's chosen people. Their law, given by Moses, was divine. Jerusalem was the holy city. They had no thought of being all alienated from God, and under condemnation, and in danger of punishment in another state of existence, on account of sin. The Pharisees professed to believe in immortality; the Sadducees denied it. When our Lord appeared, it was an open question. The Pharisees appear to have had no doubts as to their salvation,—no fear of future retribution. "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are," expresses the spirit of their religion. When Christ announced that He had "come to save that which was lost," they saw nothing that concerned *them* in such a Gospel. Any application of it to them was, in their eyes, most offensive. When Jesus declared His divine mission all their prejudices were roused against Him. They expected their coming Messiah to be a deliverer; but they could not believe that

their deliverer would speak of them as under condemnation, and denounce a series of woes against their chiefs, as hypocrites, guilty of abominable sins, and in danger of hell. Accordingly, we know how they hated the teaching of Christ and His Apostles,—how they rose in open rebellion against such declarations as these: "No man cometh unto the Father but by me"—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life"—"Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins"—"Neither is there salvation in any other." This put them on a level with sinners of the Gentiles, and seemed the greatest possible injury and insult.

Yet we find writers whose object is to undermine the authority of Christianity, speaking of it as a mere development,—a natural outgrowth of Jewish ideas. On the contrary, even to the Jews, Christianity was in many respects a new revelation, and as such rejected by the Jewish doctors as well as by the nation. Some afterwards repented; but they were few in comparison with those who continued in unbelief. Christ came to fulfil the law and the prophets; but the Jews had not understood the meaning of what He came to fulfil. There was a veil over their hearts. They trusted in ceremonial righteousness,—in outward observances. He told them that they were whited sepulchres, fair without, but full of corruption within. He came to fulfil the meaning of the ceremonial law and many predictions of the prophets; and to tell the Jews, and the whole world, from the Father, various truths of which Moses and the prophets were ignorant. If this was a development, it was not a mere development; it was not human but divine. If this was a development, it was also a new revelation. Christ Himself,—God manifest in the flesh,—Christ in His Person, His work, and His teaching, was, and is, that new revelation,—the revelation which continues to be unfolded to us by the Holy Spirit as the ages roll on.

The Jews did not believe that they were lost, or could be lost, in any sense; and, even among the Pharisees,

the very doctrine of immortality itself was an opinion and a speculation, rather than an assured belief. That the immortality of the soul is taught or implied in many parts of the Old Testament, ought not to be questioned. But the prophets wrote much which they themselves did not understand, which the most learned Jews did not understand, which even now the Church does not understand. It was Christ Himself who "brought life and immortality to light by the Gospel."

Then, as to atonement, the Jews, as a people, had no idea that their sacrifices, ordained in the Mosaic Law, prefigured the sacrifice of a Divine person who was to "take away the sin of the world." Their notions of the Messiah were various, but all different from this. They believed the slaughter of certain animals to be a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of those who offered them. This was the consecration to God of a certain money value, in token of homage, and sometimes of penitence or of gratitude. The doctrine, therefore, that the Son of man was "come to seek and to save them that were lost," by giving His life as a ransom, and thus being "a propitiation for their sins, and not for theirs only, but for the sins of the whole world," was quite foreign to all the prepossessions of the Jew. He did not believe it. He would not believe it. He felt that he could not believe it.

To say, then, that Christianity is nothing more than a natural outgrowth of Jewish ideas (implying that Jesus was only an eminent teacher of the old religion under more advanced forms) is to misrepresent the whole facts of the case. The Jews of the period considered it not only new, but inconsistent with what they had been taught, and involving blasphemous assumptions. And under this impression they ignorantly crucified the Lord of Glory. "I wot, brethren, that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers." Their own crime confirmed the greater part of them in unbelief.

To us from childhood the Gospel narratives are presented in the same volume with the Old Testament revelation and Jewish history; and the crucifixion is

seen to be the fulfilment of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and other prophecies. But the Jews at the Christian era looked for a Messiah who should be a temporal prince and military leader. When Jesus died upon the cross, they considered such a death to be the close of His career. While He was dying for their sins, they treated Him as an impostor. "Come down from the cross if thou be the Son of God." "He saved others; himself he cannot save."

They little thought that, had He saved Himself, He could not have saved the lost whom He came to save; and that they had sacrificed, at their Passover, a Divine victim,—even "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

It is perfectly true that the germs of the Christian revelation may be traced in the Jewish now, with the New Testament Scriptures in our hands. But the Jews who sacrificed our Lord did not know this. They had no such belief as that their Messiah was to be an atoning sacrifice for sin. We not only admit,—we maintain,—the Christian Church always has maintained that the Jewish and Christian revelations are parts of one whole, and that the one is not clearly intelligible without the other. But *Judaism never could have become Christianity unless God had appeared upon earth in the form of a man.* Christianity, far from being a natural product of the Jewish mind (as some writers now pretend), was so contrary to all the Jewish ideas of the period in which it appeared, that even the Apostles themselves, who were taught by the lips of the Messiah, had great difficulty in overcoming the deeply-rooted prejudices of their education, and entering upon the new world of thought which their Master opened up to them. They were not only incapable of discovering or inventing the doctrines; but when the doctrines were plainly presented to them, they were slow to perceive their meaning. And even eight years after Pentecost, the fact that Christianity was intended for all mankind burst upon them as the latest revelation of all, given to St. Peter in his vision at Joppa. The Old Testament contained many predic-

tions of the universality of the Gospel; and Christ Himself, before His ascension, had said, "Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature." Yet, for years after Pentecost, they did not realize this. The truth was hidden from them. Their eyes were veiled, till at last God tore the veil away, and enabled them to see the vastness of His design,—the length and the breadth, the height and the depth of the purpose for which the Son of God had been manifested.

In short, the characteristic doctrines of Christianity, so far from being a mere natural outgrowth of previous ideas, startled the Jewish rulers and people as novelties to be abhorred and suppressed. The condemnation of all mankind as corrupt in the sight of God,—as lost, and requiring to be saved by sacrifice; the atonement made upon the cross by Jesus, mediating between God and the human race; the resurrection of the dead, and the predicted result of the Mediatorial Dispensation; these doctrines, maintained by the Apostles, cannot be traced to any belief previously existing in the world, as their natural origin. Nor can you account, on any ordinary principles, for the reception of these doctrines. The Jews were against them. The whole world was against them. Yet Christianity spread and prospered, and continues to do so now, eighteen hundred years after its promulgation. The natural man hates the doctrines now as much as ever. They are humbling. The proud heart does not care to be told that it is under condemnation on account of sin,—that it is lost and requires to be saved, and can be saved only by the interposition of another. Yet in spite of all opposition Christianity survives and spreads and prospers, and works a complete revolution in every soul that really receives it and lives in the light of it. The number of those who so receive it is small in comparison with the number of those who profess it. This was predicted. Yet few though they be, they are the salt of the earth,—the salt that keeps society from being a hundred times more corrupt than it is. And why? Because the Lord Jesus is working in them and by them. They are under the

guidance of the Divine Spirit. Their chief aims are Christian. Great and manifold though their errors and shortcomings may be, their most earnest desire and purpose is, to be Christ-like; and this tells, more or less, on the circle in which they move. They know that they were lost; and they know that Christ has found them; and they are most earnestly desirous that others may be found too. This is the direction in which the new nature first begins to show itself. Faith works by love; and love works by loving-kindness. Oh, that such loving-kindness were more seen among those who are called by His name, who loved us and gave Himself for us!

And why is there so little of this? Why is there so little of the reality of what we profess? Because many, —*the* many,— like the Jews of old, do not know and feel that they are lost, and that they need to be found by Him who came to seek and to save us. This is the chief reason. They do not realize what it is to be in rebellion against God,—lost and miserable sinners. This is the reason why there is a measure of light in the understanding without any love in the heart. The world is thronging round us, and we are apt to compare ourselves with our neighbours,—not with the holy law of God. Thus, multitudes have a false estimate of their own state in the sight of Him who cannot look upon iniquity without abhorrence. They dismiss all gloomy prophecies of the future as troublesome ideas that interfere with their present comfort. Thus they resist and quench the Holy Spirit. They do not perceive that the deepest humility and self-abasement is required in all who would enter the golden doors of the temple which Christ has opened. The breath of the world's enchantment is upon them,—the spirit of slumber. They prefer not to be disturbed. Satan builds up around them a blinding wall, to shut out the future; and weaves new veils to cover their eyes and keep out the light; and thus they are muffled up in a silken smoothness that deludes and betrays them. The cry is "Peace, peace, where there is no peace." "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."

But they do not apply this. They cannot admit that *they* are wicked. They see much to excuse them,—to extenuate their faults; and they will not believe that God can intend to punish them, unless they be prodigiously bad. Alas! this is true of thousands. What is the remedy? Earnest prayer and diligent endeavour. God is not a God afar off. He is very near to every one of us. If we pray in earnest, we are helped. If we use the help we get, we get more. God's word is the seed of eternal life in every heart that receives it; and it brings forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred fold. But only God Himself can make His word fruitful, and it never will be fruitful except in the soil which He has broken up and ploughed with deep furrows. In short, we must be humbled with a deep sense of unworthiness,—we must feel our utter helplessness without the Saviour,—and we must receive Him into our hearts, as our life, our hope, our salvation, our God.

If He abide in us, we shall bring forth much fruit; and the joy of *that* is like the joy in harvest.

XXXVII.

CHRIST ON THE CROSS.

"And sitting down they watched him there."—*St. Matthew* xxvii. 36.

It was the third hour—nine in the morning. The Roman soldiers "crucified the Lord of glory:" and having crucified Him, they sat down and watched Him. Blood was flowing from the fresh wounds in His hands and feet, transfixed by the nails; also from His brow, torn by the crown of thorns. They sat down and watched Him. On His right hand and on His left, were the crosses of the thieves. They, too, were suffering; but they suffered justly, for their own misdeeds. Jesus had no sin. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled." But He "bare our sins in His own body on the tree." He came to do His Father's will—to die, "the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God:" and He was "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Here was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Here "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself." But the soldiers, who sat watching Him, knew nothing of this. That day they fulfilled ancient prophecies, which Jews and Gentiles still read in the Old Testament. But the heathen soldiers knew nothing of the prophecies. They had parted His raiment among them, and for His vesture they had cast lots. On arriving at Calvary they had crucified Him, and the malefactors, and Jesus in the midst; and the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, "He was numbered with the trans-

gressors." They had given Him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and the other scripture was fulfilled, "They gave me gall for my meat, and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." In the common hall, called Prætorium, at an earlier hour, they had robed Him in mockery and crowned Him with thorns. They had spit upon Him, and smitten Him on the head, and then led Him forth to crucify Him. Thus another scripture was fulfilled, "He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter." But of this the Roman legionaries knew nothing, while they sat down and watched Him there. Our Lord Himself had predicted that He was to be delivered unto the Gentiles (Pilate and these Roman soldiers) and mocked and spitefully entreated, and spitted on and scourged, and put to death. All this they had been accomplishing without knowing that they were engaged in anything more than a common execution, in obedience to orders. And now, as they sat down and watched Him, other prophecies were being fulfilled in their presence. The rulers, the chief priests, the scribes, the elders, were deriding Him and mocking Him: for they had come to see the crucifixion. The passers-by reviled Him, and railed on Him, wagging their heads, and saying, "Ah, thou that destroyest the temple and buildest it in three days, save thyself and come down from the cross. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." And thus was fulfilled the scripture, "I became also a reproach unto them; when they looked upon me they shaked their heads." "In mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together." "The reproaches of them that reproached thee, are fallen upon me." "All they that see me, laugh me to scorn. They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, he trusted in the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him." (Ps. xxii.) How exact the fulfilment! As a man, Jesus was remarkable for the tenderest sensibility. Here he was hanging on a cross, tortured by pain, and bleeding to death, in front of the soldiers, and the unfeeling crowd of high and low, col-

lected to triumph over Him in His agony, and assailing Him with bitter taunts not less cruel than the previous blows. We can form no conception of what He endured. And when we remember that He was now not merely dying as a martyr bearing testimony to eternal truth, but as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, bearing the weight of all human sin from first to last, in a manner far beyond our comprehension, our hearts, if they are not very stones, must be touched.

His mother and the other two Marys, and the beloved disciple, were standing by the cross, and seeing and hearing all this. A sword was indeed piercing that mother's heart, as had been predicted soon after the Saviour's birth. "And all his acquaintance and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things." They beheld these events with very different emotions from those of the soldiers, who sat down and watched Him there. But we have no reason to think that even they—even the mother, whom all generations were to call blessed, and the beloved apostle—understood then the meaning of the death which they witnessed. Afterwards they understood it; and John and other Apostles, who were then in the dark, have made it clear as day to the readers of the New Testament for all time. But when they stood witnessing the crucifixion, they must have been filled, not only with inexpressible grief, but also with the greatest perplexity. The veil was still upon their hearts, as it continues to be, to this day, on the hearts of the Jews as a people.

But let us consider *ourselves*. Do we, you and I, really and truly believe that our sins have all had a connection in the sight of God with that death of His Son on Calvary? Do we really and truly believe that "on him was laid the iniquity of us all?"—that He died for us, and for all the generations of mankind then unborn, as well as for all the generations that had passed away during at least forty centuries before his Advent? Make the question personal. That is the right method. Do I believe that Jesus the Son of God died for *my* sins—one and all—all the sins of my whole existence, without an excep-

tion,—without excepting so much as one sinful thought, one unbelieving, or ungrateful, or sceptical thought?—that every transgression which the holy law of God can bring against me, from the first moment of consciousness onwards, has been fully atoned for by my God and Saviour, so that it never shall be charged against me? (And what is this but believing the express words of Holy Writ, that He was "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world?") If I believe this, how does the belief affect me? Can I go on in habitual and deliberate sin? Impossible! Can I think lightly of Redemption? Impossible! Can I neglect the Word of God and the worship of God? Impossible! God has made this belief of His own repeated declaration, the very germ and principle of holiness,—the root from which alone a heavenly life can grow. Without faith, it is impossible to please God. Refusing to believe His plain declaration is—What? Is it not insulting the majesty of heaven? How can any one please God, who in his heart does not believe God? who, by conduct, says to the God of truth, "I do not believe thee. Thou hast said by the mouth of thy inspired servant that Christ tasted death for every man: but I do not believe that He tasted death for me. Thou hast said that He taketh away the sin of the world: but I do not believe that He takes away mine. Thou has given us many great and precious promises; but, in my heart, I do not believe them. Thou hast warned us, too, by many threatenings; but neither do I believe *them*. Thou hast said that sin, though atoned for, is linked to suffering, and must always involve suffering till it is rooted out. This also I disbelieve. Thou hast said that faith works by love and overcomes the world,—is, in fact, the principle of obedience; and that without faith there can be no salvation, because without faith it is impossible to please Thee, and without holiness no man shall see Thee. But I reject all this as untrue—as false." How does this sound in your ears? Is not this insulting? And if a person says this, not in words, but by conduct, is not such conduct a continuous insult to the God who made us, and heaven, and earth,

and all things that are therein? Is not this crucifying the Son of God afresh and putting Him to an open shame, and trampling under foot the Son of God, and counting the blood of the covenant, shed on Calvary, an unholy thing? Oh, is not such conduct too shocking to be capable of being adequately described? I know that your conscience says, "It is." Then where do you stand, who are still living in unbelief?—who care for none of those things?

The doctrine is this. Christ, as the second Adam, having assumed our nature, but without sin, offered it undefiled upon the cross, as an atonement for the sins of mankind, from first to last. Thus Christ demonstrated to the universe, that "the sacrifice of self is the way of salvation,"—the way of holiness, the way to heaven. He gave himself for us: we are to give ourselves to Him, that, in Him, we all may be one.

There are those who reject the atonement as inconsistent with the divine mercy. *Now* we know in part, and in part only. We know that God is love, and has no pleasure in the sufferings of any. He is a pure spirit, unchangeable, and infinitely above the influence of infirmity or passion. But the atonement is the very centre and heart of Christianity as revealed; we are bound, therefore, to believe that it is perfectly consistent with His infinite wisdom and mercy who devised the Gospel. What we know not now, we shall know hereafter. In the meantime, let none be so mad as to reject the Gospel, because the divine philosophy of it, in some of its bearings, is beyond the reach of our limited understanding.

Let us this day stand, as it were, near the cross of our crucified Saviour, and meditate on the sufferings which He endured, while "He bare our sins in his own body on the tree." *We* know what the crucifixion meant. The Roman soldiers understood not what was taking place before their eyes. Even the blessed mother and the disciples could not understand it: but they loved the Saviour, and the spectacle of His terrible sufferings rent their hearts. The Romans, on the contrary, looked on with hardened indifference. At last, indeed, when the

Centurion saw the things which happened, he was forced to cry out, "Truly, this was the Son of God." But, as Roman soldiers of that period, they were accustomed to cruelty and bloodshed. They had a day's work assigned them, and they did it in their own brutal way. "And sitting down they watched him there," with callousness, and some degree of sneering curiosity.

There are unbelievers now, who regard Christianity much in the same spirit as that in which the Roman soldiers watched Jesus.

There are others, like the disciples, who are left for a time in the darkest perplexity. They are staggered by what they see and hear. But they earnestly desire to be Christians, and God will send them light and joy.

May the Holy Spirit bless to us this meditation, and fill our hearts to overflowing with love to Him who first loved us,—who "bare our sins in His own body on the tree,"—who "died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God!"

XXXVIII.

PARADISE.

"To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."—*St. Luke* xxiii. 43.

LITERALLY, in the garden (ἐν τῷ παραδείσῳ.) The very word seems to give us a glimpse of "the land beyond the river,"—the world beyond the grave. The first Paradise was the garden of Eden. It was a place of communion with God,—near communion, frequent communion. It was a beautiful garden, with fruit trees and other trees that are pleasant to the sight. It was watered by a river, and it was to be dressed and kept by the labour of man. How far the Paradise of which Jesus spake resembles the first Paradise in Eden, we know not. What analogies there may be, we know not. Where it is situated, we know not. But this we do know,—that in one respect it resembles the garden of Eden before the Fall; it is a place of intimate communion with God. That it is a real place, and a beautiful place, and a place where the faithful departed rejoice to be, is not to be doubted, with the New Testament in our hands. Yet a multitude of questions arise concerning it, which Revelation does not enable us to answer. It is most natural that we should wish to find out the answers. But God knows best what it is best to reveal, and what it is best to leave unrevealed. And he knows the time when we are best able to bear a particular revelation, and the time when it will do us most good. He has arranged that in the present age and dispensation we are to walk by faith,

and not by sight. We are apt, indeed, to chafe under the restraints that have been put upon our knowledge. What would we not give to know the precise condition of Christian friends who are certainly in Paradise! Who is there among us that does not think of some dear ones, as most surely resting there? And yet there is no response,—no voice from the land that seems so very far off, and still may be so near. We dream of those who are gone, so vividly, at times, that when we awake we can hardly believe that they have not been really present with us; and yet, on reflection, we perceive that it was but a dream. Impressions formerly existing in the mind have been renewed; but no information has reached us. We learn nothing from our dreams with regard to the present condition of those with whom we seem to hold converse; because they always appear to be in the body, as when we used to meet in former days, though we know that the body once familiar to our sight is in reality buried and passing into dust.

We cannot but think, that, if departed friends could communicate with us, they would. Persons when dying have promised to do so, if they should find it possible. But has there ever been a single well-authenticated instance of the fulfilment of such an intention? Lazarus of Bethany had been four days among the dead, when our Lord, by His Almighty power, recalled the departed spirit; but there is no record of his having revealed anything of what he saw during those days of absence. "Many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after Christ's resurrection, and went into the Holy City, and appeared unto many." But we have no reason to think that they ever communicated any of their experiences to the living. St. Paul speaks of himself as "caught up into Paradise," (or, as he expresses it in a previous verse, "Caught up to the third heaven") where he "heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." And he says, that, "lest he should be exalted above measure, through the abundance of the revelations," a messenger of Satan was "sent to buffet him." Observe, "the abundance of the

revelations," conveyed in "unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter." It appears from all this, that God has (for the best of reasons undoubtedly) prohibited the communication to the living of any precise information concerning the present state of the dead in Paradise. Yet it behoves us to note carefully what Holy Scripture does reveal on this deeply interesting subject.

It plainly teaches that they who have died in the faith of the Gospel, have "fallen asleep in Christ," and that "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him," *i.e.* at "the coming of the Lord." It teaches that "blessed are the dead who die in the Lord," and that, to them "to die is gain;" because they are "comforted," and they are "present with the Lord," "with Christ which is far better," than "to abide in the flesh." This is the sum and substance of Revelation on the subject. The souls of them who sleep in Jesus are in Paradise, in the garden, in "the third heaven," with their ascended Lord and Saviour.

For it is important to observe that St. Paul speaks of being "caught up into Paradise," and "caught up to the third heaven," as the same thing. And our Lord Himself, in His prayer just before His betrayal, used words which imply that the souls of departed believers behold His glory: "Father I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory." He said also, "In my Father's house are many mansions," many abodes, many homes; "I go to prepare a place for you." And "if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also." Did this mean, that He would receive them unto Himself at His second advent, or that He would come to receive them, one by one, as they finished their earthly course? I think it must be seen to mean both, when we weigh the other scriptures which touch the subject. At His second glorious advent He will receive the bodies as well as the souls of His disciples unto Himself. But as each soul passes away it goes to be "present with the Lord," when it is "absent from the body." What, then, is the

meaning of the words, "I will come again and receive you?" Stephen the first martyr, when on his trial, said, "being full of the Holy Ghost,"—"Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God;" and then "they stoned Stephen calling upon God and saying, Lord Jesus receive my spirit." The Lord Jesus did receive his spirit; and thus to him was fulfilled the promise, "I will come again and receive you unto myself." We find a similar use of the word "*come*" in other promises. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man will hear my voice, and will open the door, I will *come* in to him and will sup with him." "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will *come* unto him." This means that, as God, He would be graciously present with the soul of the disciple who keeps His words; and, in like manner, He is graciously present with every such soul, when it is about to leave the body and ascend to Paradise, the Lord's garden, in "the third heaven." Speaking from Heaven, He said to the Apostle John: "To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God." In the earthly paradise, the garden of Eden, there was a tree of life and a river of water. We are told that many earthly things are after the pattern of things in the heavens. And so we read in the book of the Revelation: "and he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

This description of Paradise, the heavenly garden, where the blessed behold the glory of Christ, is highly figurative. What the figurative language means literally is not revealed. There is reason to think that such a revelation could not be conveyed to us intelligibly. The Apostle says that the words which he heard, when he was "caught up" into Paradise were "unspeakable words,

which it is not lawful for a man to utter." At all events, it is evident that what he heard was not to be repeated, and what he saw was not to be described.

One thing appears to be certain with regard to the souls in Paradise, in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection. Though they are permitted to behold the glory of Christ, their condition is still imperfect while they are separate spirits; and accordingly they are waiting for the redemption of the body from the power of the grave, as necessary to the perfection of their blessedness, and the completeness of their Saviour's triumph. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, a catalogue is given of the most famous saints of the old dispensation, men and women "of whom the world was not worthy." Then we read, "these all having attained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better things for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Then in the Revelation, St. John says, "I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held;" "and white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed, as they were, should be fulfilled." From all this it appears that the souls in Paradise are in a state of expectancy, looking forward to the resurrection of the dead, and the public triumph of Christ. "They, without us" who believe, "shall not be made perfect."

One point more. After the enumeration of the Old Testament saints, the next chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews opens thus: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight." From the mention of the holy dead as "witnesses" of our conduct, looking on from the height above us, and observing how we "run the race that is set before us," the conclusion seems unavoidable that they are to some extent aware of what is going on among the living. The allusion is to the amphi-

theatre and the spectators of the foot-races. They who were to run for the prize, laid aside every weight, and were stimulated to effort by the consciousness that the eyes of thousands were looking down upon them from the crowded galleries which rose one above the other around the arena. The expression "a cloud of witnesses" is beautiful and striking. It represents the elevation of the spectators above the runners in the race, and it represents their vast multitude,—numbers to be compared only to the drops of moisture in a cloud. Is it not a fair inference from this language of an inspired writer, (generally believed to be St. Paul himself) that the souls in Paradise are in some way permitted to observe how we are running the Christian race? He makes the consideration, that they are "witnesses" of our conduct, an argument to stimulate us to extraordinary effort.

But there is another place of departed spirits besides Paradise. We read of a prison where souls are confined; and we read that our Lord preached in that prison to the prisoners. In the parable of the Rich man and Lazarus, the place where Abraham and Lazarus were, represents the Paradise of God; and the place where the rich man was confined and was tormented, represents the prison. Whether those in Paradise are really able to observe or converse with those in prison, we do not know. We must not base a doctrine on the mere adjuncts of a parable. But I desire to call your attention to what St. Peter says of our Lord's visit to the prison, which took place (as we infer from the context) after His death upon the cross, and before His resurrection. The Apostle says, our Saviour was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the spirit; by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." In that deluge the whole population of the world, save eight persons, perished,—were drowned in the waters,—because they would not listen to the voice of God in the righteous preaching of Noah. Whether they obeyed the preaching of Christ, we cannot tell. But it is hardly possible to doubt it; seeing that then

they were surrounded by the realities of eternity, having already experienced the judgments of the Almighty.

We read of the "tree of life which is in the midst of the Paradise of God," and that "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." The word for nations, in the original, is the word from which we are supposed to derive our English word heathen. There is a distinction made between the fruit of the tree of life and its leaves. He that eats of the fruit shall live for ever; and the nations to whom the leaves are applied shall be healed. The meaning may be, that they who continue to be spiritually diseased must be healed by the leaves before they can eat of the fruit. The tree of life appears to be a symbol of Christ Himself, representing how the nourishing and healing virtues of His divine person are communicated, according to their various needs, to those who become willing to partake of the benefits.

There is little more to be said. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever;" these are the rejoicing words with which David closed his twenty-third psalm. That house of the Lord is the Father's House of many mansions. David's body has not yet ascended into the heavens; but his living soul is there, and there he has found his child, whose life on earth God refused to prolong. "I shall go to him" said the bereaved father; "but he will not return to me." With this prospect of reunion and recognition he, the inspired prophet, comforted himself. Hence we learn, that there will be recognition,—that the loved ones gone before will recognize us, and we shall recognize them. The same truth is taught by our Lord in a parable. He teaches that, instead of hoarding or squandering our money, Christians by helping Christians in time of need are thus making friends for eternity, by the right use of wealth (which is proverbially called "the mammon of unrighteousness"). He represents the departed spirits of those who had in the days of their flesh been befriended or benefited by their wealthy brethren still in the body, as waiting on the borders of the upper world to receive and welcome into "everlasting habitations" their former benefactors,

at whatever time they might be called to follow. Their welcoming them implies their recognizing them. And it is, moreover, clearly taught that there is recognition, not only among the spirits in Paradise, but also among the spirits in prison. We shall soon be in that unexplored world beyond the grave; and, in that hereafter, we shall know very many particulars which are now concealed from us. God grant that we may, each and all, be found in Christ, one with Him by faith and the indwelling of the Holy Ghost! And when, in our last hour, we pray, "Lord Jesus receive my spirit," may His answer in our heart be, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise!"

XXXIX.

THE LORD IS RISEN.

"The Lord is risen indeed."—*St. Luke* xxiv. 34.

"THE third day he rose again from the dead." These words of the creed we continually repeat; and most of us—if not all of us—think that we believe them. St. Paul says that "we are buried with Christ in baptism, wherein also we are risen with him;" and then adds, a little further on, "If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." The Apostle refers to the method of baptizing, practised then in some places (but not exclusively, we believe), by which the whole body was plunged under the water. The analogy is this. As Christ descended into the grave, and rose out of it, so the baptized person descended into the water and rose out of it. When Christ lay in the grave, His body was really dead. When the baptized person was under the water, he was in a manner separated from the world, and he was said figuratively to be dead to the world, *i. e.* dead unto sin—the sin that is in the world. When Christ rose from the dead, His body was really alive: so, when the baptized person rose out of the water in which he had been buried, he was said to rise to a new life, or to be born again unto righteousness. The language is highly symbolical; but the ideas are clear. "The Head of every man is Christ." Christ died as the representative Head of the human race; and, as the representative Head of

the human race, He rose from the dead. Therefore St. Paul uses many expressions to mark our identification with Him, in what He did and suffered on our behalf. For instance, he says, "Our old man (old nature) is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed:" "now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." "Reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And what does he mean by being dead unto sin? The next verse shows:—"Let not sin therefore reign (bear the rule) in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lust thereof." Again he says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." He speaks of himself as one with Christ so thoroughly, that his own personal life is taken into Christ's life, and becomes a part of it. This is high doctrine: but many a humble soul knows by experience its meaning. And the question that concerns us most is this, Why do not we all experience it?

I believe the reason to be, that the Spirit of God has not yet made the great facts of our Lord's life, death, and resurrection real to all of us, in such a sense that we perceive our deep personal interest in them, our eternal interest in them. The doctrines of the New Testament are to many of us like dead bones or relics, that have been handed down from generation to generation. We talk about them, and we wonder, and we profess much reverence: but they are not living realities,—they are mere dead fossils to us. And why does not the Spirit make them living realities to all, as they certainly are to some Christians? Why? The answer is obvious. Because we resist the Spirit of grace, and grieve Him away by cherishing known sin. So long as sin bears rule and has dominion within us, Christ is not recognized as our Lord and King, and the Holy Spirit will not illuminate us. Sin is like a bandage over the spiritual sight. It shuts out the truth. It prevents us from seeing the

great facts of the Gospel as realities. We just dream about them, with our eyes closed; and thus our notions are dark and confused and erroneous; and the truths of Christianity, which we profess to believe, do not in reality govern our lives at all. In short, the god of this world, *i. e.* the Devil, "hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, which is the image of God, should shine unto them," and so it does *not* shine unto them. The glorious Gospel of Christ is not, to them, a luminous and enlightening reality. Then what is the remedy?

Earnest prayer for the divine Spirit to enlighten us, and earnest striving against the sins which have hitherto grieved Him away. Will you use the remedy? We have "no power of ourselves to help ourselves," and we shall not be helped by God, if we continue to mock Him, by asking with our lips what we do not desire in our hearts, and by professing to believe what God knows we do not believe. We are assured that there is "peace and joy in believing;" and that this belief—this faith—works by love and overcomes the world, *i. e.* the love of sin. Where the love of sin is dominant, and where there is neither peace nor joy, it is perfectly certain that there is no real believing,—no realizing faith in the truths which we formally affirm in the Creeds.

We cannot serve God and Mammon. We cannot be the disciples of Christ, while we love sin more than Christ. We cannot enjoy God, while we continue to mock God. Are there not many among nominal Christians who virtually say by their conduct, "Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord. There is no God. My sin shall go unpunished. Repentance and faith and a holy life, are for ascetics and fanatics, but not for me. Clever men have doubted or denied the truth of Christianity: therefore I will take for granted that it can be proved to be false. If I go to church, it will be for the sake of appearances, and because I wish to stand well in the opinion of my neighbours, who are generally superstitious and unable to think for themselves." Are there not many whose conduct, translated into words,

means this and nothing else? Are there none among us of whom this may be said? "Judge ye yourselves, brethren, that ye be not judged of the Lord." He is slow to anger. He delighteth in mercy, and judgment is His strange work. But He will by no means clear the guilty, who refuse to turn at His reproof. He will not save nominal Christians who deny Christ by their lives, who are ashamed to confess Him, who make light of disobeying His commands. He who hung upon the cross, and lay dead in the rich man's sepulchre, and rose again, because death had no power to hold Him, is now seated at the right hand of the Father, and from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead. All power is His in heaven and on earth. The gifts and graces of the Spirit are at His disposal. To those who pray in earnest, He never turns a deaf ear. There is not a thought in our hearts that He does not know. If we desire to serve Him now and for ever, He will enable us to "know Him and the power of His resurrection;" and He will make us realize clearly and permanently, that this is the crowning event of all the Gospel miracles, that the "the Lord is risen indeed."

XL.

VICTORY AND TRIUMPH.

"Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them."—*Colossians* ii. 15.

WHILE it is true that no doctrine, not contained in the Scriptures, ought to be taught as a part of the Christian religion, it is to be borne in mind that the science of the interpretation of Scripture is still in its infancy. This may seem to be an exaggeration. I know that many think the Bible, illuminated by their favourite commentary, to be a very easy book, though they allow that it contains a few passages hard to be understood. The greatest theologians, however, confess at this hour that there may be more than one honest opinion, among skilled inquirers, as to the meaning of, at least, half the contents of the Bible. God must have intended this to be so, else it could not be so; because multitudes have worked hard to find out the true meaning of the various books. Is there one book of the Old or New Testament that has not been expounded in at least fifty commentaries? Yet if any man knows the real meaning of the greater part of Leviticus, or Ecclesiastes, or the Song of Solomon, or Isaiah, or Jeremiah, or Ezekiel, or Daniel, or any one of the twelve minor prophets, I should esteem it a privilege to take my place at his feet as a learner. What is necessary to salvation is made so plain that children are able sufficiently to understand it. But that

is a very small part of the Bible. It is the deepest mine of knowledge in the world; and we must dig as for hid treasure, if we would acquire even a little of what is below the surface.

My text has always been considered a difficult one. I have omitted the last two words of the verse, because there is a separate difficulty in them, on which it will not be necessary now to enter. ("In it," ought probably to be "in Him.") "Having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them." This evidently refers to something which took place in the invisible world when Christ died, and when He arose from the dead, and when He ascended into heaven. The "principalities and powers" must include Satan and all spirits of evil, as well as death and hell, or Hades, which are constantly personified. God, in Christ and by Christ, "spoiled" them. The meaning of this may be illustrated by the words of our Lord Himself:—"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace; but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, he taketh from him his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." What, then, were the spoils taken from death and Hades (the dwelling-place of the souls of the dead), which may be considered as one; and from "him who hath the power of death, that is, the devil"? The Conqueror took from the vanquished their spoils. What *were* the spoils? We know of nothing that was under the power of death and the devil but human souls.

The Pharisees believed "that there were places under ground whither souls went after they were separated from bodies."* The modern Jews pray "that the departed soul may go to the garden of Eden" (Abraham's bosom—the inferior Paradise); "and that from thence he may ascend on high."† They "distinguish between the superior paradise or heaven and the inferior paradise, called by them the garden of Eden." (Huetius.)

* Father R. Simon; and Origen contra Celsum, v. 260.
† In Seder Tephiloth, p. 179.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the departed souls are represented as in Hades, a region divided by a great gulf or chasm into two parts,—the abode of the righteous, and the prison of the wicked.

The New Testament speaks of three great classes of intelligent creatures who are under the dominion of Christ as our ascended Lord,—"those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth."

Our text intimates that a great revolution took place in the unseen world after our Saviour's death. Having conquered His enemies, Death and Satan, He took their spoils. What can this mean, if not that, by Himself rising from the dead, He triumphed as their conqueror, and, by taking from them human souls which they held in bondage, He took from them their spoils.

During His ministry, our Lord said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live." The time had arrived when the Redeemer of mankind was to descend to the regions of the dead, and visit the prisoners, and proclaim to them the good news which the greater number of them had never heard. It will be seen from the subsequent verses that our Lord refers to the dead whose bodies were "in the graves,"—not merely to the living persons around Him who were spiritually dead.

Accordingly, St. Peter says that Christ was "put to death in flesh, but quickened in Spirit; by which also (*i. e.* in his human spirit) he went and preached to the spirits in prison, which sometime were disobedient." (Why those are specially mentioned who lived in the days of Noah we may consider at another time.) "For this cause was the Gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God (unto God) in the spirit."

No human beings were to be left permanently uninstructed. For Christ said, "It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father (*i. e.*

yielded to the drawing of the Father, spoken of in the previous verse), cometh unto me." "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." In order to this, then, "the Gospel was preached unto them that are dead." Our Lord, after all the account that was against mankind had been "nailed to his cross," proceeded to fulfil in part the prophecies to which He had referred, by teaching in the region of departed spirits—in the prison, too—some who were ignorant. Thus He began to draw all men unto Him.

But our text shows that there was more than this. Not only had Death and the Devil no power even in their own domain to prevent the Lord of Glory from teaching the ignorant among His redeemed ones, and some who had long ages before departed from the body, but they had no power to prevent Him from leaving their domains as a conqueror, and taking with Him, as spoils, souls which they had previously held in bondage. "To this end" Christ died, and descended into the lower parts of the earth, and was revived, "that he might be Lord of the dead and the living."

One cannot but be struck by the great difference between the prospect of death as represented in the Old Testament, and in the New. Is there not reason to believe that a very great change took place in Hades after the death of the Redeemer? We read, "When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.") "Having spoiled principalities and powers (Death and the Devil), he made a show of them openly." When? where? in sight of whom? We shall see presently. And having thus triumphed, Christ sat down "at God's own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." What captivity was led captive when Christ ascended to the right hand of the

Father? The allusion here is to the sixty-eighth Psalm, beginning "Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered!" David (probably when bringing up the ark to Mount Zion) is celebrating in a triumphal song the victories of Jehovah over his enemies, especially the deliverance of the Israelites from bondage in Egypt:—"He bringeth out those which are bound with chains." "O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness, the earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God, the God of Israel." The Lord had gone before the tabernacle and the ark, in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night; and he had ascended into the heights of Sinai, after having triumphed over Pharaoh and his host. The leading up of His people out of Egypt is represented here as the triumphal progress of a conqueror leading captivity captive,—leading those who had been slaves under a tyrant, captive to Himself, to whom they belonged. The grandeur of the procession is dwelt upon. Pharaoh's chariots had been overwhelmed:—

> "Myriads are the chariots of God,
> Thousands in succession.
> The Lord, O Sinai, is in the midst of thee;
> Is in the midst of the sanctuary.
> Thou hast ascended on high,
> Thou hast led captivity captive."
> (Dr. Mason Good's version.)

Keeping in mind that Jehovah, who led Israel up out of Egypt, was God the Son in His pre-incarnate glory, carrying on the work of Redemption in a typical history, we see the appropriateness of St. Paul's application of this inspired Psalm to the triumph of Christ, and His ascension "far above all heavens."

This application is eminently suggestive of a triumphal progress or procession in the invisible world at the Ascension of Christ. The Apostles who witnessed the Ascension, saw that and nothing more, save the "two men in white apparel" who informed them that "this same Jesus" should "so come in like manner" as they had

seen him go into heaven. "While they beheld, he was taken up, and a cloud received him out of their sight."

But other scriptures give a more particular account of the manner of His second coming. St. Paul speaks of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints." "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints." Jesus Himself said, "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels:" "The Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him."

If, then, the second coming of the Lord is to be in all its circumstances after the manner of His Ascension (which appears to be the meaning), He must have been accompanied when He ascended by "all his saints," and "all the holy angels," though the triumphal train was invisible to mortal eyes. Where, then, were the spoils which as a conqueror He had taken from Death or Hades and the Devil? Does not this throw light on the remarkable words, "When he ascended up on high, He led captivity captive:" "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly?" that is, in the presence of "all his holy angels," and of "all his saints," who had themselves been liberated from Hades in order that they might grace His triumph and accompany Him to heaven, where, too, the Apostle John saw them in the Apocalypse. Christ says, after His Ascension, "I am he that liveth and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hades and of death." He had opened the gates of Hades, having taken the keys from Death; and He made a public show of the conquest of Death, and "him that hath the power of death, that is the devil," by leading away the saints who up to that time had been held in more or less darkness under the power of Death, and bringing these myriads of souls in triumphant procession to the heavens, accompanied by all His holy angels. "Thus saith the Lord, even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be

delivered." "Such as sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, being fast bound in misery and iron; because they rebelled against the words of the Lord, and lightly regarded the counsel of the most highest [including those who were disobedient in the days of Noah]: He also brought down their heart through heaviness: they fell down, and there was none to help them. So when they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, he delivered them out of their distress. For he brought them out of darkness, and out of the shadow of death, and brake their bonds in sunder. Oh, that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of man! For he hath broken the gates of brass, and smitten the bars of iron in sunder. He sent his word and healed them; and they were saved from their destruction. Oh, that men would therefore praise the Lord for his goodness, and declare the wonders that he doeth for the children of men!"

St. Paul, writing after Christ's ascension, distinctly speaks of "Paradise" and "the "third heaven" as the same place. That must be a different place from the lower Paradise, called "Abraham's bosom," in which the righteous rested before the descent of Christ into "the lower parts of the earth."

As, at His crucifixion, the graves were opened, to prepare for the rising of certain of the dead saints, visibly in their bodies, after Christ's Resurrection, so, at His Resurrection, everything had been prepared, by the conquest of Death and Satan, for the triumphal procession to heaven of all the departed saints at Christ's Ascension.

This is no new opinion, though in these days it has been lost sight of. "It was the opinion of the great body of the Fathers of the Church, until the authority of St. Augustine introduced another train of thought, that the great work of our Lord in descending into Hades was to rescue therefrom the souls of those who had died in faith"* (may we not add, and of all those in the prison

* 'Readings upon the Liturgy,' p. 109: London, 1852.

who may have been converted by His preaching?) "and to translate them to a heavenly place."

Justin Martyr and Origen thought "that the souls even of good men were, after death, under the power of the devil, who made them sometimes appear, at the charms and evocations of magicians. And Anastasius of Antioch strongly supports the sentiments of Origen, and maintains that the souls of the just were in the power of the devil and hell [Hades] before Jesus Christ descended thither, and delivered them thence by His power."* "In one instance, indeed, we read of the power of evil reaching so far as to disturb the repose of a departed saint and servant of the Lord. The prophet Samuel, at the instigation of king Saul, was brought up from the dead. And we read that when he appeared, he said to Saul, 'Why hast thou disquieted me?'"† Doubtless there are souls under the power of the Devil now; for, though conquered, he is the Devil still; and Hades, though its gates were once thrown open for the deliverance of many, when Christ loosed for them "the pains of death," is Hades still. But are "the dead in Christ" there, under Satan's power? Nay, verily, they are "with Christ;" and "to be with Christ" is to be in heaven, when Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. "To be absent from the body," is "to be present with the Lord." He died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live "together with him." "Where I am," said Christ, "there shall also my servant be." "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." "If a man keep my saying, he shall not see death," *i. e.* (if we rightly interpret) though his soul shall leave his body, according to the natural law, he shall not see Death as a king of terrors in Hades, nor be under his power, as the generations that are gone have hitherto been. "Where I am, there shall also my servant be." And therefore we say, "Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that like as we do believe thy only-begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ to have ascended into the heavens; so we may also in

* 'Calmet's 'Dictionary,' ii. 745, 3 vols. fol.

† 'The Dead in Christ,' p. 23. London: Charles Goodall and Son, 1851.

heart and mind thither ascend, and with him continually dwell," where we expect soon to be, "absent from the body, but present with the Lord."

"Christ's victory was won," says a profound writer, "where no man could follow Him, where no eye of man could follow Him. He sank. He disappeared from the eye of man under shame and dishonour. All flesh said, The enemy hath prevailed. But the eye of God followed Him, and saw His victory: and He ordained for Him a triumph, and laid upon Him honour and majesty. He crowned Him with glory and honour. Man saw not His victory, but we believe in it. Man saw not His triumph, but we believe in it now."*

How many were converted when our Lord preached the Gospel unto them that were dead, we know not. How many souls were carried away as spoils, when He conquered Death and Satan in their own domain, is not yet revealed. That multitudes are now more or less under the power of these vanquished enemies is certain. God's time for finally crushing them, and stripping them of their weapons, and setting at liberty the last of their captives, has not yet arrived. Cycles of ages may elapse before the consummation. But the hour to which prophecy points will come. No half-conquest will satisfy the King of kings. "He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet." No soul of the race for which he died and purchased redemption, can remain finally under the power of an enemy: for, if that were possible, it could not be true that the last enemy shall be destroyed. But St. Paul says, "Death, the last enemy, shall be destroyed."† There can be no enmity after that. God will "be all in all," redemption having been completed, harmony having been restored.

Christ is at the right hand of God, "far above all heavens." When Christians die, they do not descend to any Hades in "the lower parts of the earth:" they go, as the Apostle plainly says, "to be with Christ." Yet,

* A Series of Discourses by the Rev. William Dow, A.M. p. 402. Edinburgh: R. Grant and Son, 1853.

† 1 Cor. xv. 26, correctly rendered.

though blessed, they are not perfected: they still wait for the redemption of the body, at the second coming of the Lord.

"His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules o'er earth and heaven:
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Saviour given.
Lift up your hearts, lift up your voice,
Rejoice, again I say, rejoice!"

XLI.

THE WALK TO EMMAUS.

"Jesus himself drew near, and went with them."—*St. Luke* xxiv. 15.

VERY early in the morning, on the first day of the week, the women who came with spices to embalm the body of Jesus, found the sepulchre empty. The Lord had risen. Mary Magdalen, thinking that the body had been stolen away, left the sepulchre and the other women, and ran to the city to tell Peter and John. The other women were "much perplexed" as they saw the place where the Lord had lain, and "found not the body of the Lord Jesus." While they wondered, two angels appeared, in shining garments, and said: "Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here but is risen. Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, the Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again. Then they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy, and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went, Jesus met them, saying, all hail! and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, be not afraid; go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me."

On reaching the city, the women "told all these things unto the eleven and to all the rest." But "their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not."

How clear it is from this that the Apostles "as yet knew not the Scripture, that he must rise again from the dead!" One tries to conceive what their thoughts must have been from the hour in which Jesus died upon the cross. It is plain that the idea of His coming to life again, did not cross their minds. If it had, they would surely have watched at the sepulchre. But the Apostles do not seem to have taken any concern about His body. It is not said that any one of them attended at the burial. It was Joseph and Nicodemus and the women, who cared for the lifeless body of the Master. After He had been seized and led away from Gethsemane by the hirelings of the Sanhedrim, all His disciples forsook Him and fled. John and Peter afterwards followed Him to the palace of the High Priest; but there Peter denied Him, and there is no hint of any attempt on John's part to defend Him. John the beloved disciple was present near the cross at the crucifixion, and He took the mother of Jesus "unto his own home." But where were the other ten? What did they think of the supernatural darkness, the earthquake, the rending of the rocks? Even the Roman captain cried out, "Truly this was the Son of God." Had the apostles less faith than this heathen soldier? The only inference we can draw from the narratives is this, that their minds were paralysed. They were amazed and confounded. They knew not what to think. So, when the women came from the sepulchre with the tidings of the Resurrection, their words were regarded as idle tales.

But, although this was the first impression, Peter and John resolved to see for themselves, and ran to the sepulchre. They found it empty, as the women had said. The orderly arrangement of the grave-clothes and of the napkin convinced John that the body had not been removed by violence or by friends. The germ of a belief now sprang up in his mind, that the Lord had risen. After the two Apostles had returned to the city, Mary Magdalen, who had followed them to the sepulchre, stood before it weeping; and, looking in, she saw two angels, "the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain." They said unto her,

"Woman, why weepest thou?" She answered, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Jesus Himself then appeared to her. Afterwards, on the same day, He was seen by Peter. And towards evening, on the same day, when Cleopas and another disciple were walking together to a village called Emmaus, a few miles out of Jerusalem, "Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were holden that they should not know him." They had been reasoning together, or rather disputing (συζητεῖν), undoubtedly concerning the Messiahship of Jesus. They had expected that He would redeem Israel from the political supremacy of the Roman. His death had disappointed them. Jesus inquired the subject of their conversation; not because He needed to be informed, but to give them an opportunity of stating their difficulty. Cleopas said, "Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days? And He said unto them, What things? And they said unto Him, concerning Jesus of Nazareth, which was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." This could not be denied, whatever explanation might ultimately be given of His ignominious death. "The chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and have crucified Him." They were astonished that even a stranger in Jerusalem could be ignorant of the awful event which had taken place there but two days before. "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel (*i.e.* from the Roman sway), and beside all this, to-day is the third day since these things were done," (reckoning the day of the crucifixion as the first.) "Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulchre; and, when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that he was alive. And certain of them which were with us went to the sepulchre, and found it even so as the women had said; but him they saw not." These two disciples had not heard of the Lord's appearance

during the day to Cephas (Peter.) This they discovered on their return to Jerusalem that night, when the Apostles (except Thomas who was absent) and other disciples said unto them, "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon." Jesus having listened to the perplexed Cleopas and his companion, said unto them, "O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken, ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." And when they reached Emmaus, "it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight." The truth now burst upon their darkened minds. The Lord had risen indeed, and had been their companion on the road, and at their evening meal. "And they said one to another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the Scriptures?" They had now glad tidings to proclaim; and late as it was, they rose up the same hour and returned to Jerusalem, "and told the disciples what things were done in the way, and how he (their Lord and Master) was known of them in breaking of bread."

This simple and beautiful narrative is full of instruction to us. Jesus Himself is near us when we least think of it. Nay, He is ever present with us, and He is ever teaching us, if we will but listen, "the things concerning himself,"—the purpose of His advent, the nature of His kingdom, the holiness of the divine Law, the fulfilment of divine prophecy, the suitableness of the Gospel to the wants of every sinner, and the freeness with which eternal life is guaranteed to all who will receive and follow their Saviour.

Yes, He Himself, our risen Lord, is with us when we least think of it. He is ever with us. His eye is ever upon us. His ear is ever open to us. He knows all our difficulties. He understands all our doubts. He can answer the most perplexing of them. He can explain what

at times appears inexplicable. He can clear away the mists. He can disperse the clouds. He can make rough places plain. He can make our hearts burn within us, fill them to overflowing with the warmth of a grateful love, even at the very moment when they are beginning to freeze in the cold atmosphere of scepticism or infidelity. Did He not say, "I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you?" Jesus, though at the right hand of the Father, is yet present with His younger brethren and sisters in this lower world, which is to so many a vale of tears, a land of sorrow and weeping, where they greatly need to be comforted. If Jesus were not present with us, we should be indeed in a state of orphanage and bereavement. He Himself says so. It is implied in these very words: "I will not leave you orphans," (*i.e.* as you must be if I were to be no more present with you); "I will come to you." Now certainly this meant something more than a mere declaration of the omnipresence of God. We know that, while Christ visible in human nature and in human form, is at the right hand of God in heaven (words which we cannot now clearly understand) Christ as God is everywhere, fills all worlds, is present in every part of this world, in every dwelling, in every human body. That we know to be true. But that is not the meaning of our Lord in such words as these:—"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there will I be in the midst of them." As omnipresent God, He is in the midst of every gathering of savages, met together to feed upon their enemies; but, as God our Saviour, He is present among his worshipping disciples, to cheer, to guide, to warn, to strengthen, to bless them. And not only in the assemblies of His people, but in their individual hearts. He said, "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him." "We"—the Father whom no man hath seen or can see,—the Father who sent His Son into the world for us men and our salvation,—and the Son, who obeyed His Father's will, and gave Himself for us,—the Father and the Son "will come" and make

abode in the heart of each loving and obedient disciple. This means that the Father and the Son will be there, not merely as omnipresent God, but to sanctify and bless and fill with peace and joy that loving and true heart. Yet this is represented by Christ Himself as the special work of the Holy Spirit. But where the Spirit dwells, the Father and the Son dwell; for these three are one.

It is, however, to us a question of the deepest interest,—In what way are we to think of Jesus as personally present with us? God is invisible. He is inconceivable. But Christ is man as well as God, and His incarnation in our nature brings Him nearer to our apprehension. We do not think of Jesus Christ as an abstract spirit, but as God manifested in human nature and in human form. This is a great help to us. I know that Jesus is now visible only in heaven; but I know that He is present here; and, as a disciple, I have a right to think of Him as always with me, no less really than He was with the disciples going to Emmaus. When He walked with them on the road from Jerusalem, He was visible in His resurrection body. Their eyes were at first holden, so that they did not perceive His glory. But afterwards, at the breaking of bread, they knew Him,—they recognized Him. The case is different now. That glorified body is away; yet is He personally and really, though invisibly, present. It is easy for the mind to lose itself in such a subject as this. But here is a practical truth of great moment to you and me. We may walk with God in Christ, in such a manner as to have His continual teaching and protection and a most comfortable sense of His presence. He does not speak in audible words to us. But by His Spirit He moves our minds and hearts, our thoughts and affections,—explains the Scriptures according to our capacity to receive explanation,—and governs the whole inner being by His Spirit, and through the conscience, unless His governance be resisted. He is really with us, as He was with Cleopas and the other perplexed disciple going to Emmaus. He notices all the circum-

stances of our daily life, although we do not see Him with our bodily eyes, or hear His footsteps with our bodily ears. To say that God is omnipresent conveys a vast but vague idea, just as when we say, the sky is filled with light. But to know that He who, being God, is also man, with our human nature, human affections, human sympathies, is with me wherever I go, when I sleep and when I wake, when I am alone or in society, when I am engaged in business or in pleasure, when I am meditating, or reading, or talking, or praying, or preaching, or listening,—wherever I am, and in whatever difficulties,—this is a very comforting thought indeed, and it is definite enough for me to lay hold of it. I am able in a degree to realize it. I can speak to this divine elder Brother as in the room with me, as on the road with me, though I see Him not. I can be certain that He hears every word as certainly as if I saw Him standing beside me. He has an open ear for all my wants and doubts and perplexities. 'He knows exactly what I am in earnest about; and, by His Spirit, through His word, or through my conscience, or by some providential circumstances, He says to me, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when I am wandering out of the way, to the right hand or the left. If you think that this savours of mysticism, I can only say *try* it. Live for one week, for one day, in the continual remembrance that Jesus, who loved you and gave Himself for you, is at your right hand; that He is standing by; that His eye is upon you watching over your conduct and your interest, looking into your thoughts and perplexities, your motives and aims; and that His ear is open to hear your complaints and your prayers. Be not afraid of over-familiarity with Jesus your elder Brother. You cannot think of Him but with reverence. Speak to Him lovingly and confidingly, as if you saw Him before you; and you will find that this is really walking with God, and holding communion with Christ. And you will see a new force and fulness in the words, which are as applicable to each individual Christian as to the whole Church, "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

XLII.

SEEKING HEAVENLY THINGS.

"If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God."—*Colossians* iii. 1.

CHRISTIAN ministers have preached from this text for ages; generation after generation has listened to them; and teachers and taught—pastors and people—have gone down to their graves to await the Resurrection. Some profited by the instructions to which they listened: others did not. At all events, they are now dead, and the places which once knew them, know them no more. It will be just so with us. Some will "seek those things which are above:" others will not. In a few years, unless the Lord come, we shall be dead and forgotten; and other preachers, yet unborn, will urge the same text on the attention of other congregations. But, although our bodies must then be slumbering in the dust, our undying spirits will be alive somewhere; and our destiny in that coming future depends upon our conduct now. Is it not strange that thinking men can allow themselves to be so much engrossed by "things on the earth" that anything can withdraw their attention from what concerns them most,—their interests in the great hereafter? Worldly cares, grovelling passions, degrading propensities often deform human character to such an extent that it is not easy to discover any traces of the image of God. Life has well been likened to a troubled dream; for men do not generally act as if they were awake, and aware of their relation to God and eternity. Groping in darkness,

pursuing imaginary objects, neglecting substantial realities, pleased, like children, with an empty show, and, like children, regardless of the future, they travel onward to an eternal world, unconcerned and unprepared.

Can words express the folly of such a course? The day of judgment will demonstrate it.

Every man, when he dies, leaves behind him a certain character. He has been either active or indolent,—gentle or cross,—wise or foolish,—pious or careless about religion. On each of you, when you are gone, the world will pass its decision; and even the desire of leaving a good name behind you ought to have some influence upon your conduct. The good name of a father is an honour to his children, and a legacy of which no misfortunes can deprive them. It is a motive which may restrain them from vice, and keep them in the path of virtue. They are unwilling that any dark misdeed of theirs should cast a shadow upon his memory. The piety of a sainted mother is a theme on which her children dwell with affection. The remembrance of it has often melted the heart of the most hardened, and brought back the outcast to the worship of God. It touches a chord that seldom refuses to vibrate, even in the bosom of the most degraded. But if, in your selfishness, you consider this unworthy of attention, I pray you to bear in mind that your own destiny after death depends upon your character.

The chief difference between man and the brute lies in this, that man is endowed with a reasoning soul. But if men do not exercise their reason, do they not sink down to the level of the lower animals? And is not this a most humiliating reflection for a world lying in wickedness? Man was made but a little lower than the angels: yet, by his own perverseness, he descends from his position of dignity and honour; he degenerates into a mere animal, careful only of his body,—what he shall eat, and what he shall drink, and what he shall put on. Poor considerations to tempt us from blessed communion with the God and Father of our spirits! Food and raiment, houses and lands, preferred to the prospects offered

us through union with Christ! No person can be so stupid as to deny, that this is most marvellous and unworthy preference. But can any one deny that it *is* the preference, practically illustrated every day, of the great majority of nominal Christians?

The case ought to be stated still more strongly. Man is responsible to God for great endowments and precious privileges. He has been created to occupy a high rank among created intelligences. Every opportunity has been given him of fulfilling a lofty destiny. But while the beasts of the field, in their humble sphere, answer the purpose for which they were created, mankind in general do not. Indeed, for aught we know, rebellious men and fallen angels may be the only creatures in existence who are not answering the end for which God called them into being. Is not this a thought which ought to startle the boldest, and humble the most complacent? Exceptions to what we may suppose to be the general rule of the universe—obedience to God! The wonder is, not that He should threaten sufferings hereafter if we continue to rebel, but that He spares us even for a moment. Will an earthly master retain in his house servants who constantly disobey his commands, and show no regret for their misconduct? Not likely. Is it not, then, a cause of wonder, that our Master in heaven should permit men from day to day to enjoy all the bounties of his providence, while they are trampling under foot the laws which He has established for their governance? nay, more, knowingly rejecting the plan which, in His wisdom, He has devised for their salvation?

"Be wise to-day: 'tis madness to defer." The angel of death spreads his wings on every blast; and thousands of the enemies of the King are daily discovering, when too late, that they who live in folly must die in wretchedness—that they who now live in unhallowed pleasures, must afterwards lie down in misery. It becomes, then, a subject of the deepest interest to inquire how you are to "set your affection on things above, and not on things on the earth."

What are you to do? *Pray.* This is the first thing

to be done by one who sees that he is perishing in his sins, but feels that he has no disposition to discharge the duties of religion, and no relish for its pleasures. This disposition and this relish will be awakened within you, in answer to your prayers, if they be offered sincerely, and in a humble, child-like, trustful spirit. Pray, not with your lips only, but with all the earnestness and importunity of an anxious heart. If you turn from your sin, and give yourself unto prayer, you will by-and-by find rest for your soul: but if you neglect to call upon the name of the Lord, the probability is, that you will become hardened and confirmed in your indifference to all that is holy.

You will find it a habit of great value to ask yourself often, what the great purpose is to which you are bending your energies; and whether that purpose is really worthy of an immortal being. Are you living on from day to day without any particular aim at all? Or is the chief object of your ambition to secure wealth or honour or pleasure or some earthly good? Or is it your honest and earnest desire to do all to the glory of God, and to be trained for eternal service? If you hold such a dialogue as this with yourself, even once a week, you will find it most useful in many ways. No one can become great or good who expends his energies on unworthy objects. It is practical folly to live without a plan: yet how many do live in habitual improvidence, in regard both to this world and to the next! Their immediate object is to procure for themselves, and those dependent upon them, the comforts of life: beyond this, their ideas are vague and indefinite. Form a clear and intelligible outline of the course which, as a redeemed creature, you intend to pursue; and work on, with the confidence that springs from integrity and from a filial reliance upon the promises of God. Then you will be in no danger of wasting your energies. If your scheme is worthy of a Christian, success will be a rich and unfading reward. Do not advance into the future as into the dark without a light. It is true that the future is to a certain extent wrapt in obscurity; but the law of your God will be a

lamp to your feet and a light to your path. Make your plan: make it definite: make it worthy of your destiny as an immortal; and look to God for direction when a necessity arises for altering the details.

Before you can set your affections on things above, you must be convinced of the inadequacy of "things on the earth" to satisfy the cravings of your higher nature.

No two individuals since the creation of the world have lived in precisely the same circumstances; and yet all, without a solitary exception, have found "the things on the earth" to be of themselves utterly insufficient to fill the soul. Apart from Revelation, we have some evidence within us that the spirit of man survives the dissolution of the body. If we watch the world within, we must be conscious of secret aspirations after something far higher in dignity, and more permanent in duration, than anything this earth affords. Who planted these aspirations,—these elevated desires and spiritual longings in the human breast? Who, but the good God, our Creator? And now, if we believe that God is good, we may be certain that He never planted any desire within us, which He did not intend that we should be able to gratify. From this alone, we must conclude, that there is a future world in which the nobler affections of the mind may one day be satisfied. In this world, we cannot be perfectly happy. There are not, among the "things on the earth," materials of a mould grand enough. We must look to a more exalted sphere for that, without which our ever-living spirits will never be at rest. And what can strike the thoughtful mind more forcibly than the necessity of immediate preparation for admission there? Our eternity may begin at any moment; for our lives are in the hand of God who gave them, and He may call us to appear in His presence this very hour. How often we hear of sudden deaths! The departure of any one of us may be so abrupt that we shall have no time to set either our house or our heart in order.

Beware, then, against putting off what ought to be done now, to "a more convenient season," which may

never come. Try to set your affection on things above, as infinitely preferable to things on the earth. If we are truly believers, "our life is hid with Christ in God;" and, "when Christ who is our life shall appear, then shall we also appear with him in glory." How little we think of His appearing! Yet, for aught we know, it may be very near. Some crisis in the world's history appears to be approaching. The event will declare it, whatever it may be. How blessed to be free from all anxiety about future events!—to know and be sure, quite sure, that all things must work together for our good! and, above all, to anticipate with joy the coming of the Lord, as the most desirable and glorious event that it is possible for our minds to contemplate!

XLIII.

ALL FULNESS IN CHRIST.

"For it pleased the Father, that in him (Christ) should all fulness dwell."—*Colossians* i. 19.

And we read in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, where the Deity of Christ is so plainly declared, "Of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (or grace heaped upon grace). "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself;" and in Christ "dwelt the fulness of the Godhead." Christ, the second Adam, second Head and representative of the human race, (second, in the order of revelation, though the original archetype and root of all humanity, including the first Adam himself), has supplies of grace and truth and wisdom and strength and love and blessing for all. Whatever good there is in us, has been received from Him,—has been communicated to us by the Holy Spirit from out of the Divine fulness that is in Christ. Whatever light is in any man's mind has been received from our Divine Head, who is Christ; for He is the true Light, who lighteth every man through the conscience. He teaches every man that it is his duty to do what is right and to avoid what is wrong. It is the light thus communicated from Christ that makes us responsible. If we did not know that it is our duty to do what is right, we could not be justly held responsible for our conduct. But every man has enough of the true Light shining in his soul to make it clear to him that he is

bound to do what is right, and that he is not at liberty to do what is wrong. Therefore, every man is justly responsible, and under obligations, to act up to the degree of knowledge which he possesses.

All this is plain enough; and it is undeniable that we have been highly favoured in comparison with the greater number of our brethren of the human family. God hath given us ample opportunities of knowing the truth most essential to our well-being in this world, and in that which is to come. If we acted up to the measure of our knowledge, we should all be Christians indeed. Our friends and acquaintance would see such a change as could not fail to excite inquiry. And if we thus availed ourselves of our advantages, we should continue to receive from Christ, our Head, grace heaped upon grace,—increase of knowledge and love and enjoyment,—proofs of our being in communication with a Divine scource of supply, which would put to flight for ever our last lingering doubt.

If a younger son in a foreign country has an ample allowance from his elder brother at home,—if he draws his allowance regularly, and has renewed assurances that he may draw more and more largely,—that he may draw as much as he can use for himself and lay out to advantage for the benefit of others around him; what would a person actually enjoying all this, think of any man who should try to persuade him that his elder brother, with whom he corresponds regularly, has long been dead,—that he never had any wealth,—that no remittances have been made,—and that the affluence which the younger brother is actually enjoying is all a delusion? What could the younger brother think of one who should argue thus?

Yet this is but a poor illustration of the real facts which take place in the experience of every believer in Christ and His promises. From Christ's Divine fulness and unsearchable riches he is permitted to draw, and he does draw, by using the means of grace appointed; and he is conscious of real enjoyment and comfort from day to day, and from hour to hour. He knows that the

most splendid work of imagination never conveyed to his inward nature—his real self—the same kind of comfort in the smallest degree. And, therefore, when he finds that any person seriously questions the reality of communications between Christ and the soul, he can only answer, "Try the experiment. You are invited as well as I. If you avail yourself of the invitation, you will no longer doubt the reality of the blessedness."

There may be great differences of speculative opinion among those who enjoy this blessedness:—great differences of capacity, of knowledge, of taste, and so forth. But there can be no difference of opinion as to the reality of the blessedness. There are, we know, great differences of opinion among business men upon the theory of banking. New books are written about it from time to time, giving new views. But men agree to differ about the theory, so long as the practical part works. No man, whatever his opinions on the theory of banking may be, doubts the real advantage and value of a draft that has been honoured, or of the few written words which are at any time exchangeable for gold or silver. Think of a man with hundreds of Bank of England notes in his desk, starving in a garret within a stone's throw of the bank, because he does not believe in the Bank of England! The infatuation of that man is not greater, I solemnly affirm, is not half so deplorable, because it refers only to things temporal, as the infatuation of any one of you who, with the promises of Christ in your hand, starve your soul, and live in spiritual want and misery, because you will not use the promises, nor believe in the authority by which they were issued. The cases are parallel as far as they can be, using transitory and imperfect human institutions to illustrate what is Divine, and therefore permanent and infallible. The Bank of England may break. The security of the English Government may become worthless. A Bank of England note might, in a revolution, become of no more value than a piece of waste paper. But the promises of Christ can never fail. When all human institutions shall have passed away, they will stand.

Their value never can be diminished, because the truth of God is immutable, and the unsearchable riches of Christ are inexhaustible. For it pleased the Father that in Him (as our Divine Elder Brother and surety), should all fulness dwell. In Him, incarnate, dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead. If I could be the means, under God, of persuading you to believe this, you would regard me, for the rest of your days, as your greatest earthly benefactor. For this belief and persuasion would introduce you to peace and joy, of which none but those who do believe have any conception. I speak in the fear of God, and remembering that I shall soon have to render to Him an account of the truth and sincerity of the words which I utter; and I do declare, that, so far from exaggerating the real state of the case, I feel unable to express in any form of words a thousandth part of what I believe to be the whole truth on this subject. That I speak sincerely, God knoweth. Will any of you persevere in rejecting the glorious Gospel of Christ, to which you have been listening from childhood? Will you not test it by real personal experiment? Will you not see whether these things are so? Will you not come to Christ as your Saviour, and avail yourself of His love? Will you not love Him, since He first loved you and gave Himself for you? Will you not try to use His promises in the way He has appointed, and thus draw from His inexhaustible fulness grace and truth and love and joy? Oh! how shall ye escape, if ye neglect so great salvation? How shall you stand in His presence to be judged, if you go on in sin, rejecting His mercy, and despising His love? Let me most earnestly beseech you to pause and consider; and act upon the plain and honest words which you have now heard, and which I may not much longer have an opportunity of addressing to you. If you do, we shall never be ashamed nor confounded. If we draw from Christ's fulness we shall be filled according to our capacity to receive. We shall be, in the only true sense, rich and happy and blessed for ever.

XLIV.

THE ASCENSION.

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven."—*Acts* i. 11.

THESE words were addressed to the Apostles by the "two men" who "stood by them in white apparel," when the Lord of glory ascended before their eyes from the Mount of Olives, near Jerusalem.

"This same Jesus." Mark the identity. This was none other than the Eternal Word, who was in the beginning, who was with God,—who *was* God; who dwelt with the Father, was in the bosom of the Father, was intimately and essentially one with the Father; who was the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person, and who had glory with Him before the world was. It was "this same Jesus," lately crucified and risen from the dead, and now ascending into the sky, who was to come (the angels told them) in like manner as they now saw Him go into heaven.

"This same Jesus" made all worlds, and all that they contain. "Without him was not anything made that was made." His almighty power reared the universe. He is the architect of creation, the builder of suns and stars, and it is He who now sustains and regulates the whole. "By him all things consist." He is the eternal Centre around which all worlds are revolving, and to Him they are each and all subordinate.

"This same Jesus" came into the world for us men and our salvation. "The word was made flesh and dwelt

among us." He came "to redeem us from all iniquity," and to destroy the works of the devil,—to conquer evil and destroy it, root and branch. In the brief sojourn upon earth of that glorious being, God our Saviour, how His greatness was obscured! how His glory was veiled! —and all this that He might show how He loved us, by giving Himself for us! Had He been recognized by those to whom He came, the language of every heart would have been, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself:"—"My Lord and my God!" His humiliation was necessary. Without it, no soul of man could have been saved:—

> "The Son of God thus man became
> That men the sons of God might be."

"This same Jesus," crucified for the sins of the world, returned to His original glory,—to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. At the right hand of the Majesty on high he pleads His own merits in our behalf. As omnipresent God, He is here in the midst of us, now, at this moment, blessing with His grace all who receive Him,—all who welcome Him to their hearts,—all who trust in His love, His righteousness, His promises. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" is what He whispers in the ear of every one who loves Him. Thousands and tens of thousands of listening souls are hearing His voice to-day, and recognizing it as the voice of the Lord their Shepherd,—recognizing it as the voice of Him who was crucified on Calvary, and taken up into the clouds from Mount Olivet,—recognizing it as the voice of God their Saviour. We, the few persons in this island who believe in the Lord Jesus and look for His appearing, are not alone. We are but a few units in a mighty host, scattered over continents and other sea-girt isles, in cities, towns, villages, and homesteads,—some living on bleak hillsides, some in fertile valleys, some living in crowded streets, some under God's eye alone in solitary places,—some in lowly huts, and some in great palaces, and some passing to and fro upon the deep. Jesus the Lord, "this same Jesus," is with us all.

He says to each, "Lo, I am with you alway;" "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,"—never, *never!* "The mountains may depart and the hills may be removed: but my loving kindness shall not depart from thee:"—"I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward:"—"I will rejoice over thee, and thy joy shall no man take from thee. Thou shalt be mine when I make up my jewels." All the resources of Oriental forms of speech—the strongest and most expressive of any in the world—are exhausted in setting forth our Saviour's love.

Do you believe this? or does it fall upon your ear like a too familiar strain, of which you begin to weary? Weary of hearing such news as this! Then you do not believe it. Who ever was weary of hearing that he had been loaded with riches and promoted to honour? Yet, riches and honour! What can man give to his fellow-man, compared with what God promises and what God can give? Here, then, is a test which you can easily apply. Many pass their whole lives without being sure whether they believe in Christ or not. If you are weary of hearing about His love to you, then you do not believe. There is peace and joy in every believing heart just in proportion to faith,—just in proportion as the message is believed. So, if your mind is always like a troubled sea, if you have never known what mental repose is, if your chief thoughts, your best thoughts, are always given to worldly schemes and temporal advancement,—then you need have no doubt at all about your position. You are deliberately deceiving yourself if you allow yourself to doubt. You are a Christian only in name. You do not believe, and you never did believe, the Gospel of God our Saviour.

For, if you really believed, your whole heart would, at times, leap for joy, during your clear-sighted moments, when you more fully realize the truth, and know for a surety what is before you,—the glory that waits you at the coming of the Lord.

And, if you are a Christian, in any sense beyond that which distinguishes whole races outwardly from Mahometans and Pagans, you rejoice in knowing,—you have

great comfort in knowing, that you are not travelling alone, but as a unit in a mighty host, led by One under whose guidance all His true-hearted followers must conquer. You are glad that there are so many; *you earnestly wish there were more.* You would make personal sacrifices in order to increase the number, for you desire in your heart the welfare of every human soul. You wish that yourself and every individual of mankind might be thoroughly purified from all iniquity,—made thoroughly Christ-like, because you know that there is no lasting happiness for human souls away from God. But, even now, you find great comfort and pleasure in the thought that you are marching in the ranks of a mighty host,—that there are hundreds of thousands of men and women, and little children too, spread all over Europe, America, Asia, and parts even of Africa, and over all the seas and the isles of the sea, in whose hearts "this same Jesus" is Lord and King: who, though they have difficulties and trials and sorrows very like your own, enjoy with you the same consolations, and anticipate with delight the same final triumph, when the Lord shall come in the clouds of heaven, in like manner as He departed eighteen centuries ago. And is it not a cheering, an inspiring thought, that from North to South and from East to West,—in every land over which the flag of England waves, in old cathedrals, in mighty minsters, in crowded churches, in regimental tents, and on the decks of England's navy, "this same Jesus" is worshipped by millions in the very same words? They read the same psalms, they listen to the same chapters, they read or sing the same ancient hymns that we read and hear and sing in this church to-day. And to-day there are myriads of communicants receiving from the Lord's table the memorials and symbols of the body and blood of "this same Jesus" who was crucified, and who in His visible human form is to come again in the clouds, in glorious majesty, from that heaven into which He ascended. Surely this ought to help us in some degree to realize the communion of saints, in which we all profess to believe. Those who are called "saints" in the New Testament are all who believe in "this same Jesus." If we are not

"saints," in the Bible sense of the word, we are not really Christians, whatever we may think of ourselves, or others may think of us; nay more, nay more, mark this! —we "deny the Lord that bought us." For all who, having heard the news, do not deny the Lord in their life and conduct, are among those who in the New Testament are called "saints," because their earnest desire is to be like Him, who is perfectly holy. And if we desire to be like Him, and to rejoice in His second advent, and in the prospect of meeting Him, or of being among the ten thousands of those who shall come with Him,—for "the Lord shall descend with ten thousands of His saints,"—we shall delight to observe His ordinances and commandments now; we shall yield Him service, not grudgingly and with reluctance, but cheerfully and joyfully, remembering the great love wherewith He loved us.

"This same Jesus,"—crucified, risen, and ascended,—knows at this moment what answer each heart is giving to what has now been said. He sees that some are trying to invent excuses for not coming to His table,—oh, how weak, how shallow, how worthless they must be!—and His Divine Spirit is pressing upon every listener the duty of obeying the parting command, "Do this in remembrance of me."

If we really delight in these thoughts,—if we really believe that soon we are to be "for ever with the Lord," our meditations will be continually turning to Him now. In heart and mind we shall be continually ascending to the glorious place whither He hath gone before. We shall feel that we are one with Him who is in heaven, and that, our life being hid with Christ in God, we are, in a sense, in Heaven already, enjoying its blessedness, not only by anticipation, but also by that mystical union with Christ which is revealed to our faith, if not to our consciousness. A family is emigrating to a far country. The elder brother is gone before; he is preparing mansions for those who are left behind. They know that beautiful homes are awaiting them; they know that everything love can do is being done for them. Some of the brethren have already

gone thither. Others are about to depart now. All will follow by-and-by. How, then, will those feel who are still left behind? Will they not look forward with joy and eager anticipation to their meeting in "the land that is very far off"? Will not their thoughts, day and night, be with the elder brother, who has done so much, and is still doing so much, for them? Will they not consider that, as their interests there are being attended to and provided for, they have, in a true sense, a settlement there already; because now, in reality, their home is no longer in the place of their birth, but there where the elder brother is? Thus, though in person they have not yet crossed the sea, in heart and mind they are far away in the land of their adoption. Their waking thoughts,—their very dreams, are full of it, and they are longing to be away. They have a dark and stormy sea to cross, but still they are longing to be away. They do not now belong to the country which they are leaving, but to the land to which they are going. Their hopes are there; their elder brother is there, and others of the younger brethren are also there. No wonder, then, that the far land occupies so large a place in their thoughts and their affections. It would be strange if the case were otherwise. Why? Because they believe all that their elder brother has told them,—they rely on all that he has promised. And so will it be with us, if we believe what Christ has told us and what Christ has promised. Thoughts travel far in little time. Loving thoughts have the swiftest wings. With more than the speed of light, they fly from shore to shore, from earth to heaven. If now "our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ," by the Divine Spirit uniting us to Christ and making us partakers of the Divine nature, heavenly-mindedness must be our chief characteristic. How can it be otherwise? Let each of us take a look into his own heart, and ask, "Do I find it so? Am I surprised and ashamed and grieved that it is not more so?"

"Oh, for a closer walk with God!"

Oh, for a clearer view of the glory of Christ, and of His relation to us! Then we should not waste a thought

on some things that now engross us. Then, as the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so would our souls desire Thee, our Lord and our God. We should desire, not only the joyful sense of Thy presence, but perfect conformity to Thy will. Oh, surely we have no cause to be ashamed of the Gospel of Christ! We know its value if we have felt its power. Let the world see by our behaviour whose we are and whom we serve. Let our faces be as though we would go to Jerusalem,—Jerusalem the golden,—where our hearts are, where our treasure is,—because there Jesus ever liveth. Glory be to God on high!

XLV.

ALL RECONCILED.

If, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.—*Romans* v. 10.

THAT our human nature is sinful,—that our personal character is sinful,—that the taint of sin has poisoned the very fountains of thought and emotion, the deep springs of our being; all this no one of us can hesitate to admit. We know quite well that this is no mere dogma invented by priests,—that this is no mere speculation,—that this terrible fact of our sinfulness is pressing upon us every day, every hour. We cannot ignore it. We cannot shut it out from our consciousness. It runs through every part of the web of our daily life. We can detect it in almost every thread. We can see it darkening all the lights, and deepening all the shadows. We are indeed what, in oft-repeated words, we confess ourselves to be, "miserable sinners,"—sinners by nature and by practice,—and, if there were no Saviour, sinners without God and without hope, ever tending downward and ruinward, unredeemed from the curse and from the consequences of evil.

It is needful to dwell often and thoughtfully upon this, in order that we may know how much cause for thankfulness is given us in the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour.

But one of the effects of sin is more or less to darken our understanding with regard to spiritual truth,—to

make us inclined to call evil, good, and good, evil,—and to produce habitual indifference, nay, even the wildest recklessness, concerning our relations to God, and our prospects in the endless future. Men are often ready to hazard the happiness of their eternity for the gratifications of an hour. Is it not so?

Now, sin is transgression, and transgression is rebellion. This rebellion implies enmity against God our Creator, and the resisting of His good Spirit. Something within tells every one of us that this rebellion makes us guilty. We know that guilt deserves punishment. And there is a mysterious awfulness in the idea of punishment to be inflicted by God. We can form a definite idea of human punishment: but the punishments threatened by God Himself against the obstinately impenitent, lie beyond the sphere of our knowledge. This, together with the consideration that it is our merciful and loving Father who threatens, and that even His most terrible threats are dictated by tenderest love, ought at least to fill us with deep solemnity,—to make us seriously attentive,—to make us earnestly anxious, when a message of reconciliation is announced, of which many among us do not yet appreciate the benefit.

Yet whether we appreciate it or not, the benefit has been obtained for us. Reconciliation has been made. Our conduct cannot alter the fact. We may avail ourselves of the reconciliation, or we may continue in rebellion. But, in any case, it remains true, that "when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son." His death made peace for us, for all. He is "a propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." He tasted "death for every man." The way of access to God was opened up to every man. Every man was made welcome to come with his petitions to the foot of his Father's throne. The divine Son took upon Him our human nature, that He might make us more or less partakers of the divine nature. He gave Himself for us. In doing so, He had a distinct object in view. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy

the works of the devil." In order to achieve this, His death was necessary. The reasons are at present beyond us. They have not been revealed. Most probably we could not understand them. Undoubtedly the incarnation and death of Christ have relations to the universe which are now hidden from us. The Scriptures plainly intimate (but without going into particulars) that the mediatorial reign of Christ is by no means to be confined to the inhabitants of the planet on which it pleased Him for a time to dwell. "All things were created by Him and for Him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist." "It pleased the Father by him to reconcile all things unto himself,—whether they be things in earth, or things in the heavens." What a revelation is here! All creatures upon the earth and in the heavens reconciled to God! It is only from a few such hints as this passage furnishes, that we are made aware of the existence of beings in the heavens who needed to be reconciled to God. Christ himself said, "all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth:"—"All things are delivered unto me of my Father." And St. Paul declares it to be the revealed will of God,—"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven (the heavens) and which are on earth.

We are among the creatures on the earth. The human race to which we belong has been reconciled to God by the death of His Son. Reconciliation implies previous enmity. "When we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them." And "if when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved through his life." "He ever liveth to make intercession." All power is His in heaven and on earth. If His love moved Him to reconcile us to God when we were enemies, and even to lay down His life, in order that by His death the reconciliation might be effected, how much more will He care for our spiritual interests now that we

have been reconciled! If His death did so much for us, what may we not expect from His life? If reconciliation was the effect of his death, must we not believe that the continued furtherance of our spiritual prosperity will be the effect of His life, "seeing, he ever liveth to make intercession for us"?

Brethren, the practical effect would be very marked, if we really believed what St. Paul here teaches. We could not live in any known sin, if we really knew that we are being spiritually nourished from day to day, and from hour to hour, by the life of Christ,—if we really knew that we are one with Him,—that although this is necessarily expressed in figurative language, it is not a mere figure, but in every aspect a blessed truth, inseparably connected with our present and eternal welfare. Yet nothing can be more certain. All our hope is in a once-crucified but now risen and glorified Redeemer. Was there no resurrection? Did Jesus remain under the power of death? Is the narrative of His rising again on the third day a fable? Then is our faith vain, then is our hope a delusion, then is our preaching an imposture. On the other hand, are the Gospels trustworthy and true? Is the substance of apostolic teaching of divine authority? Is the Christian religion from God? Then is the risen Jesus at this moment King of kings and Lord of lords. He who was crucified on Calvary is now at the right hand of God, waiting till his enemies be made His footstool, and making all things in heaven and on earth converge toward the accomplishment of the object for which He became incarnate,—the subversion of evil, the destruction of the works of the devil. In that lofty seat in the heaven of heavens, God the Son continues to be manifested in human form. He is still the representative of the human race. He is still our elder Brother. He is still the same person who was called Jesus of Nazareth while he dwelt among us. It is He who was pre-eminently the "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." It is He who hung in agony upon the cross for half a day more than eighteen hundred years ago, and who there "died the just for the unjust,

that he might bring us to God." And it is He who rose on the third day from the sepulchre in the rock, and, forty days thereafter, ascended visibly into heaven from the Mount of Olives, near Bethany. Let none doubt His identity. Jesus of Nazareth is not sleeping in the dust of the earth. His flesh saw no corruption. In His glorified human body, He is at the right hand of God. He is worshipped by the angels. He hears our prayers. He knows our wants, sympathizes with us in every trial endured for His sake, and pities us in every trial brought on by disobedience. He watches our every struggle with invisible enemies. Through Christ who strengtheneth us, we can do all things, and we shall at last be more than conquerors. As God, He is ever present with us. His Spirit is in our hearts. That Holy Spirit takes of the things of Christ, His grace and love, and shows them to us in such a manner that we are attracted and melted, drawn by the cords of love, and softened into penitence for transgression. This work is going on in millions of souls. The prayer "Thy kingdom come" is being daily answered. The hour is coming when God's will shall be done on earth as it is in heaven, and when every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Knowing such truths as these, is it possible to regard them with apathy or indifference? Not if they are really truths to us,—not if we receive them into our hearts as indubitable facts in which we have personally an eternal interest. If we really believe the Christian revelation, these truths will be springs of action,—motive powers within us, now and throughout our whole future career. If we are unmoved, it is because we are unbelieving.

Here are two great central truths,—Christ on Calvary, and Christ in heaven. Do I believe, do I know that I stand in a personal relation to these truths?—that through all eternity they must continue to be thought of with deep interest by every human being,—nay more, by every intelligent creature of whatever rank in the scale? One great cause of irreligion is our inability to conceive religious truths vividly and continuously.

We admit certain truths into our statements of belief; but we do not realize them. We are not able to picture them before our minds vividly enough to leave a lasting impression. If we could keep clearly before our minds what we know to be inevitably true,—for instance, that very soon you and I, every one of us, old and young, without exception, shall be in the state of departed spirits, —that, by-and-by, we shall all be standing before the Judgment-throne of Christ,—of Him who was crucified, and is now interceding for us,—of Him who, by His own death, reconciled the race to God, and by His life is now carrying on the work of our personal salvation; if these truths were before our minds, even at intervals, with anything like the vividness of reality, it would be quite impossible for us to look upon religion as a secondary and subordinate matter, not requiring much attention from persons immersed in temporal business, and sufficiently recognized by occasionally or perhaps regularly appearing in church. It would be impossible for us to pass over lightly such a revelation as our text contains. It would be impossible for us to be anything but earnest Christians. If we turn this over in our minds,—that irreligion is in a great degree the consequence of inability to keep clearly and steadily before us truths and events concerning which we have no doubt whatever,—the consideration will influence our practice, and we shall endeavour, by greater thoughtfulness, to supply the defect.

XLVI.

PRIESTHOOD.

"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him, who hath called you out of darkness, into his marvellous light."—1 *Peter* ii. 9.

THE Apostle addressed these words to his fellow-Christians. Do they apply to us? And if not, why not? If there are any to whom they do not apply, it must be because they are not really Christians.

When the Israelites were encamped in the wilderness near Mount Sinai, God spake to them, by Moses, in these words:—"If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then shall ye be a peculiar people unto me, above all people (for the earth is mine), and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests."

"A kingdom of priests!" What a remarkable expression! In what sense could this be true?

The answer is at hand. As the sons of Levi were appointed to minister in sacred things and to bear witness for God, before the house of Israel, so the whole house of Israel was to be a peculiar people, a chosen generation, an holy nation, before all the rest of the world. This office they were to discharge, this witness they were to bear, by walking in all the statutes and ordinances of the Lord blameless. There were set apart priests, in a strict sense of the word, to minister to the children of Israel: the children of Israel were set apart as priests, in a wider sense, for the whole human race. They were devoted to God. To them pertained the service of God and the

promises. God Himself was their King; and, in a broad sense, they were "a kingdom of priests,"—a nation specially called and elected to be holy, to be an example to mankind, and by all their sacrifices to prefigure the one true and eternal sacrifice of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world."

But their election was, to all outward seeming, a terrible failure. They did not fulfil the duties of their high calling. They were very far from being "an holy nation." On the contrary, they were stiff-necked and rebellious. Their history is a history of national wickedness, varied by intervals of short-lived repentance. Instead of being an example to the heathen, they were often as bad as the very worst of their neighbours. Often under Moses, under Joshua, under the judges, under the kings, and even after the long humiliation of the captivity, they refused to obey God's voice, they would not keep His covenant, they preferred the honour which cometh from men to that which cometh from God only. The good men and women among them, of whom we read in the Bible, are like the few stars of different magnitudes, that shine out from among the clouds on a dark night. Then it follows, that the bad people among them, though belonging to an holy nation, and a kingdom of priests, who were collectively God's own chosen people, were still individually and personally anything but worthy to have such language applied to them. In like manner, when we say in the Creed, "I believe in the Holy Catholic Church," we mean that the whole Church of Christ throughout the world has been chosen out of heathendom to certain privileges; has been called by God to be holy—to be, in fact, God's own people and a royal priesthood. Yet, although this is true of all collectively, who are admitted into the Christian brotherhood, those who do not walk worthy of their high calling, who habitually neglect what they know to be their duty, and habitually do what they know to be wrong, are not in reality Christians. As he was not truly a Jew, who was merely one outwardly, so neither is he truly a Christian who is merely one outwardly. To be a true

Jew was to be a sincere worshipper of the true God, as then revealed, walking diligently in the way of His commandments. To be a true Christian, is to be a sincere worshipper of the true God, as now revealed, walking diligently in the way of His commandments; loving the Lord Jesus Christ as our divine Saviour in whom we are reconciled to the Father, and obeying the Holy Spirit, speaking to us through the written Word and in our consciences. If we live thus, we are endeavouring to be worthy of our election and high calling as outwardly members of the Church of Christ: and to all such the words of St. Peter are certainly as applicable now, as they were to sincere Christians when he wrote them:—"Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (*i. e.* God's *Peculium*—God's own). And why? Why are ye thus chosen to such honour and dignity? "That ye should show forth the praises of him, who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." As the Jews were chosen to be lights of the world, so have we Christians been, and in a higher degree.

Now I say that such a text as this ought to startle careless and inconsistent Christians, living out here among the heathen. Are we letting our light so shine before men, that they glorify our heavenly Father? Are we so kind and gentle, so generous and forgiving, so pure, so self-denying, so temperate, so strictly honourable in our minutest transactions, so inflexibly truthful, even when the truth seems to damage our interest for the moment, that the heathen with whom we have dealings are struck by the beauty of such a character, and begin to inquire what heavenly and divine element there can be in our belief, which produces such rare and beautiful results?

For what is the priesthood to which all Christians are called? Hear St. Paul:—"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." "To do good and to communicate forget not, for with such sacrifices God is

well pleased." St. Peter says, "Ye also are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

In these passages, the sacrifices are evidently spiritual. The word is used in a sense which at that time was new. Manifestly St. Paul did not mean that we are to offer our "bodies a living sacrifice" upon a literal altar, to be consumed by fire. No one would be so foolish as to assert that. In the Epistle to the Hebrews, we read, "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name." This defines the nature of the sacrifice, and limits the word most distinctly to a figurative signification.

As the Jewish Church was declared by God to be "a kingdom of priests," so is the Christian Church declared to be. And as there was an order of men specially ordained to minister to the people in holy things, in the former, so there is in the latter. But the Jewish priesthood and the Christian priesthood are widely different, as regards the nature of the offices which it was designed that they should perform. And whence arises the difference? Plainly from the fact, that the Jews set forth in their sacrifices an atonement then future, while we look back to an atonement already complete. As, in their day, the one atonement had not been made, they were commanded to offer victims, representing Him who was yet to come: as, in our day, we trust in the sacrifice already made, we cannot offer anything of the nature of atonement. We must let that alone for ever. Christian sacrifices are spiritual sacrifices. From the position which we occupy in the order of time, and from the very nature of the dispensation under which we live, the word sacrifice has a new meaning, and can with propriety be employed only in a figurative and secondary sense.

I would press upon your attention this view of the subject at present, because there are those who try to promulgate the idea, that in the Lord's Supper a sacrifice is offered, which is something more than "a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving," as our Prayer Book defines it: that it is a sacrifice which may, in some degree, be looked

upon as a repetition of the propitiatory and atoning sacrifice offered up once for all by our Lord Jesus Christ. I cannot help regarding such as "Judaizing teachers," and their teaching as a heresy tending directly toward the superstitions of Rome.

In our Lord's institution of the Supper, there is not a hint that He intended it to be looked upon as a sacrifice similar to those which were offered upon Jewish altars. Those sacrifices all prefigured the sacrifice of Himself upon the cross; and when He Himself was thus offered, the meaning of the ancient sacrifices was realized, and the atonement was for ever complete. What need, then, for any further sacrifice in any respect similar? We hear much, in these days, of "a commemorative sacrifice;" but the phrase is surely calculated to mislead. And it does mislead. The Lord's Supper is a most sacred commemorative rite, intended to bring before our minds and hearts the one sacrifice, and thus to be a means of spiritual nourishment to the sincere recipients, rejoicing in their union with Christ and with all His disciples. But more than this we cannot affirm, without going beyond the teaching of Scripture. We may offer the bread and wine to be blessed by God for our spiritual benefit; and, in this limited sense, we may speak of an "oblation." But in the Old Testament meaning of the terms, there can now be no oblation,—no sacrifice,—no altar,—no priesthood. All these were done away when our Saviour died for the sins of the world.

A royal priesthood! kings and priests unto God! How astonishing the goodness, the mercy, the condescension of our God! What are we? Miserable sinners; rebels; ungrateful, obstinate, hard-hearted offenders, chargeable with accumulated aggravations of guilt; and certainly deserving, for our wilful, deliberate, inexcusable sins, the wrath of God, and all that may be expected to follow.

A royal priesthood! Sons of God! Sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty! Heirs of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us! Yes, it is to this that

in our childhood we were formally set apart by our baptism; and if we do not realize the privileges to which, as redeemed creatures, we have been born, and visibly set apart, the blame lies—where? Only with ourselves. Alas! that we should be so ready to make light of such privileges!—to neglect our interest as heirs of immortality!—to sell our princely birthright for a mess of pottage; some poor temporary gratification of appetite or passion! Alas! that the world should have such a hold upon us!—that we should make so little effort to shake off its entanglements!—that so many of us should be more willing to be kings and priests unto Mammon than kings and priests unto God!

We would, all of us, be ashamed to confess that we are not guided by reason. Yet, if we who are immortal neglect the interests of immortality, how great, how manifest, how amazing our folly! Set apart to be kings and priests unto God; yet slaves to the devil, the world, and the flesh! Is this wisdom? to yield our prospects in the coming ages to a mere transient gratification of the grosser part of our nature? How can we defend such folly? How can we excuse our conduct to ourselves; not to mention the account we must render to our God? Esau's bartering his temporal birthright was a trifle compared with this. Men who act thus, do not think seriously of the exchange they are making, voluntarily, deliberately, and with the terrible consequences staring them in the face. Godliness hath promise, both of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. They lose, therefore,—not to speak of the future,—the most substantial pleasures of the present time; those true pleasures of the higher nature that leave no sting behind, because they are foretastes of a blessedness that shall be ever on the increase. Strange infatuation! as wonderful as it is common, as common as it is ruinous! How can a thinking man spend one hour in converse with his heart, and in contemplation of a future life, without passing sentence on himself as a fool for his worldliness, and regarding the wildest enthusiast in religion as in comparison prudent and wise? It is be-

cause men live without foresight, that they live without God. It is because men shut the eyes of their reason, that they neglect Revelation. Every fact, every argument, every decision of consciousness and of intellect, is against them.

We cannot plead ignorance. We know enough. We know that we shall soon die and be buried, in the earth or in the sea. We know that, though our bodies must be resolved into their elements, our souls shall still be alive, thinking, feeling, acting somewhere; nay, enjoying or suffering intensely. We know enough. We know the terms of the Gospel. They are not metaphysical abstractions, but plain, intelligible, practical truths. Oh, then, you who are spiritually set apart to be "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people," see that here, in the sight of the heathen, ye "show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light!" See that ye let your light shine before them so steadily, so clearly, that they seeing your good works may glorify the Christians' God, the only living and true God, your Father who is in heaven.

XLVII.

THE WORLD CONVERTED.

"Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word, that they all may be one;—as Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that Thou hast sent me."—*St. John* xvii. 20 21.

NEVER were words uttered more weighty with meaning. Here surely is Revelation—an unveiling of the mind and heart and will of God. With our present limitations, we can catch only a glimpse of it. It is the glory of the Lord passing by, and proclaiming Him to be "the Lord God merciful and gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." The world had despised and rejected, and was about to crucify the Lord of Glory in human form. He was praying now more directly and specially, not for the world, but for His Apostles; yet not for them only, but also for all who should believe on Him through their word; and, brethren, not for *them* only, but also for a still wider interest contemplated in the distance—a multitude whom no man can number, a multitude as the stars of heaven and the sands on the sea-shore, countless,—*the very world itself*, postponed, but not forgotten, remembered, because redeemed! "That the world may believe that Thou hast sent me"—may believe that I am the Messiah, "the Christ, the Saviour of the world:"—that they who opposed and blasphemed and crucified Him—His enemies in all countries and all periods,—the world as opposed to the elect—the world outside the election—that *they*

might ultimately be brought to believe that God had sent His Son—and that this might be accomplished, how? Through their beholding the unity of believers with each other—with Christ—with the Father.

Does the world witness any such unity now? The rival Churches are very temples of discord, with entrenched camps around them, and outworks of pride bristling with guns. Petty strife within; a general war without! Noise and smoke, and dust and conflict; a very Babel of confusion! And overhead, roofing them all, hangs a black thunder-cloud, the accumulated sins that have gone up to God. It threatens each hour to burst in judgments, and fill the earth with terror. Yet, nearer us, under the cloud, even where it is darkest, hope sweetly sings to those who will listen, and never wearies of repeating the strain,—"*that the world may believe*" the blessed prayer of Jesus, the Son of God, "the God of Hope." Then may "the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope, by the power of the Holy Ghost!"

Yes, "joy and peace in believing," notwithstanding all the abominable wickedness that is rampant in the rival Churches. All *that* is from beneath. It was all foreseen, and certainly provided for. Though at the birth of Jesus, the song of the angels was "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men," yet Jesus Himself foretold, that before peace and good will could prevail on earth, His disciples were to expect a dark period of strife and anarchy. "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth [think not that peace will be the immediate and general result of my advent]. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household." Not that this was the purpose of His coming (it was the very reverse), but that this would be one of the incidental and inevitable consequences of His coming; and, though mysterious to us, with our narrow horizon, quite consistent with the

purpose for which our Lord was manifested,—the total destruction of the works of the devil. Evil must be developed, that its whole power and malignity may be seen, felt, and understood: thus the triumph over it will be the grander and the more signal.

The powers of darkness have been at work in the Church from the beginning, devising unholy alliances, suggesting fatal compromises, urging to fierce collisions. The same thing is going on now. Inveterate pride, bursting with ill-temper, goes forth disguised as holy zeal. All the arts of treachery are plied, all principles of fair and honourable dealing are repudiated, on the plea of ecclesiastical expediency. Men, as corporations, do without scruple what, as individuals, they would blush to be responsible for. Thus, instead of any near prospect of visible unity, there is a perpetual tendency to multiply divisions, and widen the distances. Christ is wounded in the house of His professed friends. Love grows cold; envy grows restless; avarice grows impudent; and the world, instead of being persuaded to believe, brands all religion as hypocrisy or delusion, and points the finger of scorn.

Yet who can doubt but our Lord's prayer will one day be answered? When that prayer is answered, the world shall be persuaded to believe, by witnessing the blessed unity and harmony, and brotherly love and piety of those who have already believed.

The text, like many other passages of Holy Writ, speaks plainly of the election, out of mankind, to high and peculiar privileges and a glorious destiny, of certain persons under the Christian dispensation: *first*, the eleven apostles, and *secondly*, those who should believe on Christ through their word. For them Christ prayed:—"As Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." Note the comparison, and also the form of expression. "In us." (This is Trinity Sunday.) Imagine any creature, even the highest archangel or seraph, speaking of God the Father Almighty and himself as "us!" "As Thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us." And by whom

is this living union effected and maintained between God and the soul? By the Holy Ghost. "It is the Spirit that quickeneth."—"The Spirit dwelleth with you, and shall be in you."

One with one another; and one in God, the Father and the Son, by the indwelling of the Holy Ghost! One, as the Father and the Son are one! Oneness, union, the most intimate that can be! This is to be the privilege of the elect; not only of the Apostles, but of all who believe on Christ through their word. Now, we cannot but observe that the world is spoken of as ultimately believing, *not* through the word of the Apostles, but *by the blessed spectacle of Christian union.* This is to be the means of the world's conversion, when the prayer of Jesus is answered. But the same ultimate union with God, which is spoken of as the destiny of the elect, is not said to be the destiny of "the world," which would not be convinced by the testimony of the Apostles. We find, in studying the true words of Christ, that what is omitted is often as worthy of notice as what is affirmed. The omission here seems to point to what we read in the Revelation, that the Elect Church shall be with Christ "within the holy city," while the nations of them that are saved shall dwell "in the light of it." Clear enough it is that there will be marked distinctions. Though all shall be blessed according to their capacity, yet all shall not be equally glorious. "For one star differeth from another star in glory" [one shines more brightly than another]: so shall it be among the hosts of the saved. They shall shine as the stars for ever and ever; but they shall be of different magnitudes—their individual luminousness shall vary, like that of the material stars in the heavens. But whatever the number may be of those here spoken of as "the world," and whatever the degree of their blessedness in the universal kingdom that is to be, the point which I desire now to press upon your attention is this, that the visible unity of Christians is to be *the means of converting the world.* This may disentangle many of our present perplexities. This is the height to which the grand old hymns of the Church are

perpetually lifting us, in spite of our logical theologies and artificial systems. From this commanding eminence, leaving behind the misty low-grounds, where dogmatists are shut in by the fences and hedges of traditional interpretations, we may survey a prospect ever-widening till the sea meets the sky, and all gloomy impressions of life are swallowed up and lost in the splendours of the glory that shall be. From the threshold of the coming eternity, controversy dwindles into the narrow dimensions that belong to it; and we perceive that an atmosphere of infinite love surrounds and encloses all.

"Oh for a heart to praise my God!
A heart from sin set free."

What bondage we live in!—a double bondage!—bondage to sin; bondage to tradition. Our necks are under the yoke. We love to have it so. We would not have it otherwise. Ah! What! Freedom; integrity; truth; the plain words of God manifest in the flesh! are these nothing, nothing to *us?* God be merciful to us, and lead us to the Rock that is higher than we!

When one reads the popular commentaries on this prayer, offered up by our Divine Lord, it is hard to suppress a feeling of indignation. "The world believing!" say they. "What can such belief amount to? The devils "also believe and tremble." Now pause and consider this.

Does the Son of God who came into the world "that the world through Him might be saved," pray that the world may believe only as devils do? Is this divine truth, or is it profaneness? I ask you, with the New Testament in your hands, to determine.

If words have meaning, I take it that here our Lord prays for the conversion of the world. If the belief in Christianity is the first condition of salvation, I see here a prayer that, through such belief, the world may be saved. If there is sincerity on this side of heaven, it surely must be found in the words of Jesus. If ever prayer implied the certainty of a favourable answer, it must be prayer offered by the Son of man in union with

omniscient God. I cast all mere theories to the winds. I treat them as chaff of the threshing-floor. I will not listen to philosophy, Calvinistic or rationalistic, when Christ speaks positively, plainly, unmistakably. Let God be true, though His truth should prove all speculative philosophies of the past and present to be mere quagmires of error.

In the text, Christ prays for the conversion of the world by certain means; and from this it may be concluded with certainty that the means indicated by Him will be the only efficient means, and that until these means are actually in operation, there can be no final success. Now I beg you to observe how contrary is this to the wide-spread expectation that the world is to be converted by the preaching of missionaries. Where in the Bible, I ask, is there any promise of such a result from this agency? There is no such thing to be found anywhere in the Scriptures. It is Christ's command to "preach the Gospel to every creature." Thus the Elect Church will be gathered in from among the nations. And when the Gospel shall have been "preached for a witness—(mark the word, a *witness*)—unto all nations, then shall the end be"—*i. e.* the end of the pre-millennial dispensation, when the Lord shall consume Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, and destroy him by the brightness of His coming. It is *then* that Christ's prayer will begin to be answered: then, and not till then, that the prediction which it implies will begin to be fulfilled. The world will believe that the Father sent the Son—will believe in His divine character and mission, when it sees the blessed effects of such belief in the perfect union of Christians—a thing never seen upon earth before. It is then that men shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks,

> "Shall hang the trumpet in the hall,
> And study war no more."

That it is the duty of the Church of Christ to send the Gospel to the heathen is unquestionable. This is the Lord's command. By the publication of the Gospel,

many will believe, and the number of the Elect, to be gathered out of the world in the present dispensation, will be completed. But if the great means of converting the world is ultimately to be,—not the mere publication of the Gospel—but the living spectacle of its actual results in the union and harmony of those who have already embraced it, does it not strike us at once that a chief cause why Christianity now advances so slowly is the absence of that union and harmony among professing Christians? Put the case practically with reference to ourselves here. We are surrounded by heathen. They observe our conduct, and they draw their own inferences concerning our religion. We have a few missionaries busily engaged in preaching and teaching and distributing Bibles and tracts among those who can and will read them. Well, the progress is slow—the success is small. Example goes further than precept. Example convinces, when precept is disregarded. Example is followed, when precept is scorned. Prejudices and superstitions, which remain undisturbed in the presence of mere argument, would, by God's grace, melt away before the unimpeded persuasiveness of Christian example. But does the Christian community afford such an example? Can we close our eyes against the fact, that Christian preaching is much more than neutralized by the unchristian example of those who call themselves Christians? So much for Christianity among the heathen. But look at the prevalence of unbelief of a hundred shades at home. May not that be in a great measure accounted for in like manner? If all the Christians in this place were filled with holy love to Christ and to one another; if they were continually going about doing good in unselfish and self-sacrificing ways; if covetousness and pride and envy and evil-speaking and self-indulgence and crooked dealings were unknown among us—oh, what preaching of Christianity to the heathen *that* would be! A little of it would go further than thousands of sermons and millions of tracts. And so in London, in Paris, in New York, in all the great centres of nominally Christian civilization, if the common remark among worldly-minded

sceptics and infidels; if the remark forced upon them by patent facts were this, "See how these Christians love "one another! what joy and peace they have in believing "their doctrines! how they abound in hope! what a pro- "found meaning there seems to be to them in what we "consider mere fable and imposture! how calm they are "in the midst of trouble! how little they think of losing "their property or giving away a large proportion of it! "how kind and liberal and personally indefatigable they "are in all good works of charity and philanthropy—in "helping the poor, tending the sick, cheering the stranger, "raising the fallen, succouring the wretched! how obvious "it is that this world's advantages are not the chief con- "sideration with them; but that the paramount object "in their esteem is the glory of Christ, the prosperity of "His kingdom, the imperial sway of His principles, and "the ingathering of all to a participation in the happi- "ness which they know to be already a sure possession to "themselves." If this, I say, or anything like this, were the strain of remark forced upon unbelievers by the lives and behaviour of Christians, there would be little to fear from atheistical arguments or infidel romances. The golden age predicted would descend upon us speedily. The unity and harmony and divine beauty of Christianity shining in Christ's disciples, would subdue the world, and bring it to its knees before the throne of our Father who is in heaven.

Now, we are responsible, each in his place and in his degree, for the present state of things around us. This responsibility we cannot evade, or put away from us. In proportion to the prominence of our position is the circle of our influence. But there is not one of us without influence. Our life is a moving picture before our neighbours. It is not passing unobserved. Either our light is shining before men, or we are spreading the dominion of darkness. Men may be helping infidelity with might and main, without uttering a word against Christianity. Your very attendance at church has an effect in this direction, if by your life you give the lie to Christ's teaching. Herein the words of Christ are seen to be most

true, "He that is not with me is against me." Then let it be known to all around us under what flag we are sailing over life's troubled sea; by what chart we are steering; for what port we are bound. Let love be without dissimulation. Let us strive after that unity which love produces, and we shall reach ere long the heavenly shore, where love is universal, unity unbroken, blessedness eternal.

XLVIII.

THE GLORY OF THE LORD.

"The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."—*Habakkuk* ii. 14.

THAT day is coming, let the enemy labour as he will. Infidelity may lift up its shameless front in the face of history and experience; but the works of the devil are doomed. Christ shall conquer. His truth shall stand. His disciples shall increase. His empire shall spread; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom the only one that shall not pass away. The phases of the world's opinion are ever changing; the trumpets of the enemy are ever sounding; little advantages are magnified into great victories; worn-out arguments are put into new shapes; buried sophisms are revived as discoveries; the mummies of old Egypt are painted and tricked out in the finery of to-day; but they are as dead as the fossils of prehistoric ages, and no art of the modern magician can make them otherwise than horrible and hideous, when their ghastly features are exposed to the light, and their mouldering cerements outspread in the breeze. For a time, art and cunning may deceive; but, in the end, a bad cause must be baffled. They who know God's name will put their trust in Him: they who in their hearts have felt the power of His truth know that it never can be subverted by the most specious forms of opposing error. They can look on with confidence and with calmness, awaiting the result; for God

in Christ is governing His Church; the divine Spirit is dwelling in it, omnipotent though unseen; and, be the number or the talents or the evolutions of its enemies what they may, as surely as there is a God, "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Infidels themselves must confess, we presume, that there are many things connected with the historical facts and the historical progress of Christianity which infidelity, with all its modern skill and appliances, has not yet begun really to account for.

When we think of the early training and social position of the twelve Apostles—of the condition of their own country—of the condition of the Roman empire—of the attitude which they assume towards the Jewish leaders and a world lying in wickedness, it is evident that their indomitable courage, and heroic fixedness of purpose, and utter indifference to temporal advantages, must have seemed very like madness in the eyes of most of their contemporaries. Their Master had been crucified. They affirmed that He had risen from the dead; that they had seen Him ascend into heaven accompanied by angels; and that He was what He had professed to be, the Son of God, the Saviour of the world. They asked people everywhere to believe this, and to become disciples of their crucified master. In the whole previous history of mankind, had ever an appeal been made that seemed so hopeless? Yet did they go forth in vain? Was their trust in their ascended Lord disappointed? Was their confidence in the divine Spirit, whom He sent to guide and strengthen them, a dream—a delusion? Nay, verily. At the sound of their preaching, in which there was little of the power of man's wisdom, multitudes, not in Judea only, but in distant countries far apart, flocked to the banner of the Cross, casting their idols to the moles and to the bats, and showing in their lives the supernatural power of the truth as it is in Jesus—a living power which elevated their thoughts, and purified their hearts, and transformed their character, and made their conduct a standing wonder and paradox to all who witnessed it.

And how was this? By what agency was this effected?

Was it by the learning or the eloquence, or the cunning craftiness, or the administrative skill of the Galilean fishermen that all this was brought about? The force of ridicule would turn out of court the man who should venture to affirm anything so absurd—anything so contrary to acknowledged facts. How then is it to be accounted for? If infidelity knows, let infidelity tell us. We desire to be informed. Perhaps the *Tübingen* school will explain it. The truth is our foundation, our hope, our confidence, our life. We are not afraid of the truth. Afraid of the truth! It is the Christian's earnest prayer that he may be led into all truth; it ought to be his daily prayer that he may not be allowed to cling to blind prejudices or ignorant errors, but may be led by the hand, like a little child, in all simplicity and trustfulness, into that glorious temple of truth of which the visible universe is but the starry curtain, and Jesus Christ the High Priest, the Prophet, and the King. If any of our fellow-men have discovered some new province of spiritual truth, to which Christians have not attained, let them show us the way into it, and we will follow; we will rejoice to follow. Truth will govern the universe in the long-run. It is the extreme of folly to oppose it, or deride it, or turn away from it. But let us not be led a dance through the darkness by fireflies, or glowworms, or the phosphorescence that ever creeps over rottenness, into some fathomless abyss. Let us walk in the day, as the children of the day. Let us journey where the sun shines. Let us see the light, and feel the warmth, and be cheered by the radiance of the sun of righteousness, which has already risen upon our horizon with healing in His wings —which has already shone into our hearts with enlightening, comforting, heavenly rays. We dare not prefer darkness to light under any promise of discoveries. We dare not go groping into the spiritual world by lamplight, however famous the guides may be. If we are Christians at all, we know in some degree what spiritual daylight means, and what righteousness means, and what love means, and what truth means, and what the life of God in the soul of man means. And if the discoveries

to which we are invited mean anything inconsistent with these—these eternal realities, these known certainties, then will we have none of them; because we are sure from the past experience of our own souls that they must be lying vanities, snares, traps, decoys, delusions.

We are told that Christianity has been tried and proved a failure. We are told that the promises of Christ have not been fulfilled—that, if they had been, the whole world ought to have been Christianized long before now. They who maintain this cannot, surely, have read the New Testament with much attention. What has happened hitherto in the history of the Christian Church has been in exact conformity with predictions recorded there. A long apostasy has taken place. Faith asleep, love growing cold, the labourers idle because their Lord delays His coming—society lapsing gradually into the state in which it was in the days of Noah; these are foretold as signs of the second advent,—signs, for aught we know, to be continued for many centuries. Take the Book of the Revelation, which, I suppose, it will be admitted was not written yesterday, or last year, or in the last century—which, according to the showing of infidelity itself, is at least 1700 years old; take it as the historical interpreters read it, or as the futurists read it; in either case, the present state of the world in relation to Christianity is not different from what was to be expected. I know that infidelity has lately been rampant and jubilant and loud. It fancies that the tide has turned in its favour, and that, ere long, Christianity will be swept away by the overwhelming flood. This is nothing new. Infidelity, when it has spoken, has ever been loud-voiced and brazen-faced, arrogant and impudent, and, not unfrequently, ignorant as well as shameless. But God, in His own time, will put a hook in the nose of that leviathan: he shall not be allowed to overthrow the walls of our Zion: by the way that he came, by the same shall he return, defeated, exhausted, powerless,—his armies cut down by an invisible Power, and his end miserable in the place from whence he came. There is a spiritual kingdom in the world—whether men

will hear or whether they will forbear; there is a kingdom of God, which, like leaven, is spreading slowly but surely throughout the mass of human society: there is a true Church of Christ, hidden under a variety of outward forms and organisms, and sometimes almost crushed under the burdens of externalism, but still a living reality and an indestructible unity. This Church—this kingdom of Christ, is ever bearing witness to the truth before the world.

And, brethren, it is the voice of Christ that is thus heard speaking through His Church, through all His faithful servants everywhere. This voice is addressed not only to great communities in their corporate capacity, but to every individual soul that is seeking rest but finding none. Is there no such person here to-day?—not one soul that has been seeking rest without finding it? No doubt there is. Then to you the Lord is speaking. At the door of your heart Christ is knocking. And He is not standing there empty-handed. Remember "the unsearchable riches of Christ," and that "He is rich unto all that call upon Him." He giveth to all men liberally, largely, on a grand and royal scale of munificence, to all who come to Him in earnest, forsaking their sins, and trusting in His righteousness. Then, if you have never come before, will you come for His blessing now?

Very likely not. You have rejected Him Sunday after Sunday all your life long, and you will probably reject Him to-day. God grant that it may be otherwise! But if it be, the case will be exceptional; it is more than could be expected, judging from the past. For you have been doing up to this day what the world at large has been doing, rejecting the Lord of Glory. And if the case is to be otherwise now with you, it must be the work of the Holy Spirit, who is convincing you of your own sin and of Christ's righteousness. And when a spiritual change like this comes over a family or community, it is the same divine Spirit who produces the conviction. When Christ ascended up on high, He "received gifts for men, even for the rebellious." The gifts

and graces of the Spirit are at His disposal. "The glory of the Lord," as the Redeemer of mankind, is the deliverance of the captives, the salvation of the lost. The prison-gates may be closed with massive bars, but the Omnipotent Saviour can open them by a word. Many wanderers may seem to be lost irrecoverably, but the Omniscient knows where to find them. The time is coming when the last of the infidels will be convinced. Satan has been judged and condemned, though he is not yet bound. But he is to be bound. And on the very day on which he first feels the weight of his chain, infidelity will be struck with paralysis from head to foot. It will not be able to move a finger or articulate a word. And then shall begin the jubilee of the Church of God. Then shall ring across the round world, and upward to the opening sky, the rejoicing song of enfranchised nations—all kindreds and tribes and peoples: for their eyes shall behold the King in His beauty, and "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."

THE END.

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